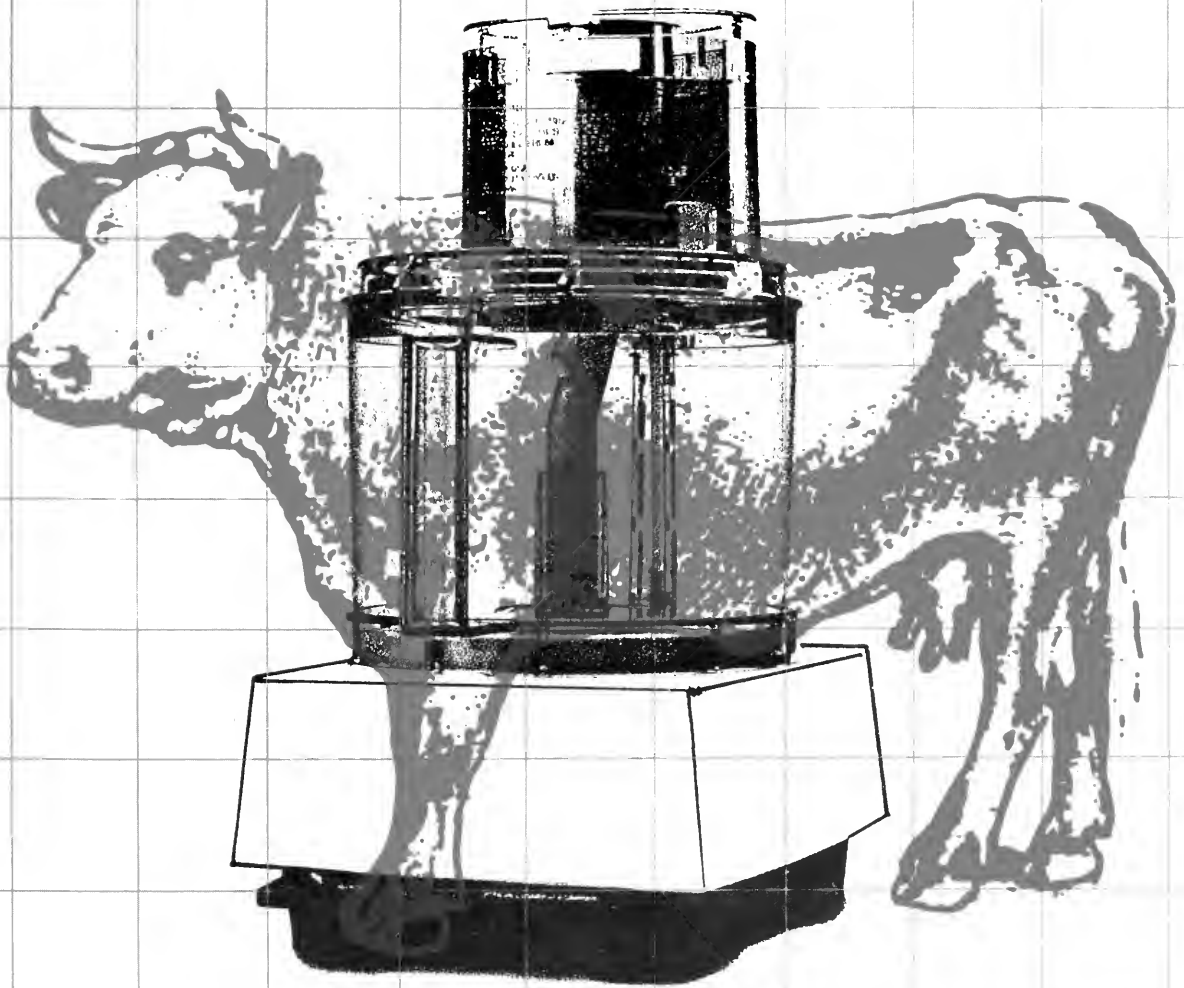


PROCESSED WORLD 23

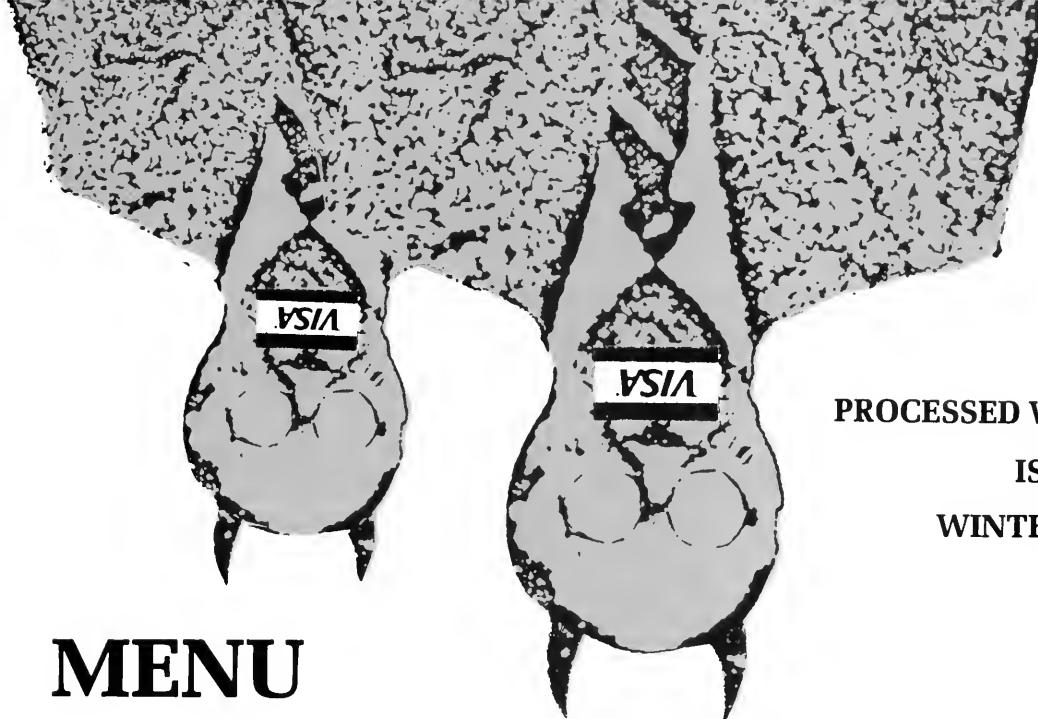
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PROCESSED WORLD

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Front and Back Covers by Ramone Muñoz

DEBT HEADS



GRAPHIC BY PAULINE P.

The great eighties credit card binge: In this issue, Gary Richardson embraces it, Harold Tuttle curses it, Dennis Hayes analyzes it, and Mir Tamin Ansary sexualizes it. What are these guys talking about, anyway?

Of course, everyone knows by now that the corporations, the government and private individuals have all taken on enormous amounts of debt during the Reagan years. It has become a cliché to say that we've mortgaged our future to the hilt. All this debt isn't bad for everyone, however. The truly advantaged few whose income growth exceeds the interest rate on their loans are rewarded on their indebtedness. The continued increase in their wealth will make it easy to pay off past obligations. For the economy as a whole, that's quite a gamble, particularly since most of the debt is incurred for nonproductive purchases like consumer goods and armaments. Wall St. certainly isn't betting on future growth. Stock prices are so low that takeover artists can make money by

going massively into hock to buy out a company's shares. They hope to recoup by immediately selling off chunks of their new property to other empire builders.

Maybe we should view the mounting debt as a national game of hot potato. Prices are high, wages are low, and everybody wants to be rich. We can enjoy the illusion of wealth by robbing from the capital investment fund, paying for our toys by borrowing from each other. Let the devil worry about those who end up stuck with the bills. Gary Richardson reflects that attitude, all right, in his **You've Got to Give Me Credit**. Richardson's main source of income is his credit card pyramid, in which newly acquired cards are used to pay off old ones. Richardson views credit as a kind of "magic," as if wealth falls from the sky.

Harold Tuttle, in **The Credit Card Gulag**, counters this credit card mysticism with a dose of bureaucratic logic. Tuttle, who is trapped in the collections

department of a large bank's credit card operations, speaks from the belly of the beast. Everyday, he sees people dragged under the wheels of the system when their debt gets out of control. Richardson cannot count on simply ignoring his liabilities if things go wrong, Tuttle warns.

In **Big Shopping**, Dennis Hayes leaves Richardson and Tuttle to argue over the credit cards themselves and examines the shopping frenzy the cards support. Quoting the *Wall Street Journal*, Hayes notes that shopping has become "arguably the nation's favorite pastime next to television watching." Shoppers, he says, are attempting through consumption to fulfill their fantasies and fend off their insecurities in an unstable, lonely world. Marketing strategists have successfully integrated image and product to encourage consumption for its own sake.

Speaking of fantasies, Tamin Ansary takes Hayes one step further in **Born Again**. He constructs a sexual fantasy involving actual credit cards. What does this story mean, anyway? Readers will just have to divine the meaning of credit card sex for themselves.

Beneath Ansary's far-out conflation of sexuality and credit card use lies a central question: How do pressures around sexual identity and sexual achievement help spawn shopping mania? Remember, there are two genders out there, with different relations to credit card consumerism. Gender-based buying patterns arise because men and women hope that purchasing the right products will give them a greater masculine or feminine allure. This is a hope constantly exploited by Madison Avenue to induce still more consumption. Of course, achieving a respected sexual identity is not an end in itself. It is supposed to enhance one's social status and lead to greater sexual gratification.

But if sexuality is key to creating compulsive consumption, it is also key to its dissolution. In opposition to the



PHOTO BY D.S. BLACK

yuppie ideal, let me introduce the *zippie* lifestyle—led by those with zero income and plenty of sex.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

Forget Shopping, Let Your Fingers Do the Walking I've been rich, and I've been poor, and rich is better, but only marginally so, believe me. Making \$100,000 a year did not make my family five times happier than making \$20,000 did. We weren't even 50 times happier. Spending all the money was a tedious, time-consuming process that diverted our attention from the struggle to get real satisfaction out of life. The frustrations of it all killed my father.

Now I'm a creditless deviant in a culture that increasingly revolves around credit cards. My applications for those cards are uniformly turned down for lack of a credit history. (That paragon of progressivism, Working Assets, suggested that I go downtown, get a department store card, make some purchases, and reapply in a year. So much for socially responsible financial counseling.) Yet I manage to survive and sometimes flourish in this apparently deprived condition.

That's where the *zippie* concept comes in. My stereo's twenty years old, but I don't care. A little intimate conversation that leads to hugging is a lot more fun than a new stereo. And I'd trade a Mercedes for a night of cuddling and fucking any day. The way I figure it, the world is rich enough: People who feel socially-sexually fulfilled will always find enough to eat, but those who lead empty lives will always be hungry.

If they noticed, the media might dismiss *zippie* types like me as "stuck in the sixties." The late sixties were an exciting time—I'd rather be stuck there than in a checkout line. Twenty years ago, people started seeing sex as more than some fun thing for your off hours, an empty pleasure that could be enhanced by purchasing the proper packaging. Sexuality was instead considered central to building the networks of committed relationships that would form the basis of revolutionary community, in which a broad sense of solidarity and compassion would cut through capitalism's alienated materialist values. Realizing humanity's erotic potential, then, would be prerequisite to human liberation.

So the revolutionaries failed in the seventies, brought down by their own capitalist roots as much as anything. At least they had some good times with their friends. In the eighties, the Reaga-

nite message is to fear other people and avoid unconventional relationships. Trusting "strangers," really anyone but the traditional authority figures, will get you hurt. With the advent of AIDS, the line has become "sex is death." It's safe to go out to buy something, but not to go out in search of love.

AIDS is the product of a very particular set of environmental coincidences that facilitate the disease's transmission. In the early eighties, gays were hit by rapidly spreading waves of infection as individuals sexually passed the AIDS-causing virus onto others. Such waves did not occur among straights and lesbians even though plenty of nongays acquired AIDS through IV needle sharing and contaminated blood products. It should have been clear years ago that there will be no heterosexual or lesbian AIDS epidemic to parallel the gay one. Recently, AIDS transmission in gays, too, has fallen to near zero.

Gays have suffered enormously from AIDS, and that is reason enough for everybody to be concerned. But despite the horrible buffeting it has taken, the gay community will survive—and so will gay sexuality. In fact, gays' extraordinary response to the epidemic was possible precisely because of the erotic bonds holding the community together. The wide range of activities undertaken by gays, from putting political pressure on the government to caring for the sick to making individual adjustments in sexual practice, represents an unparalleled case of spontaneous self-organization in which the established authorities played a decidedly secondary role.

The way gays have adapted and preserved their sexual fellowship in the face of AIDS is the most inspiring story of the decade. It shows how we all can unite around our sexual energy to challenge the forces that repress us. So cut up those credit cards. Don't worry, be happy. And use your happiness to be powerful.

□□□□□□□□□□□□□□

And, kiddies, here's what else we have for you today:

In **Our American Economic System**, a poem that appeared right at deadline time, Bruce Jacobson comes from out of nowhere to show that he's a *zippie* too. See, already it's a trend. In contrast, Bob Slaymaker's story *Mom*, which concerns a NY bag lady, describes the attractions and contradictions of what might be called a zinfu-

(zero income, no sex) way of life. Then, in *Children of the Night*, Allen Krebs—a sort of Gary Richardson without credit cards—tells what it's like to work in the public schools of an inner city. We also have a story, *Family Business* by Susan Rumsey, that extends shopping to life after death, with macabre results.

In our section on *Esprit de Corp.*, Dan Herman and Trixie T-Square reveal the seamy underside of creating a sexy image for women. As usual, manipulation and oppression dominate the work experience, Esprit's upbeat public face notwithstanding. Esprit's special irony is that its employees, themselves mostly female, are laboring to provide the very shopping ideals that motivate people to keep toiling away. The work-shop-work cycle is secure because its promoters are trapped in it, just like everyone else *except the zippies*. They too crave material enrichment to compensate for the debasement of human relations that starts on the job.

Finally, we have a spread on the conflict between staff and administration at the **San Francisco Art Institute**. SFAT's employees have seized the initiative in their lives. They're standing up together against their superiors, and having fun while they're at it. I bet their sex lives are good, too.

— Green Fuchsia & the PW collective



GRAPHIC BY S.W.—N.S.W., AUSTRALIA



From Down Under

LETTERS FROM OUR READERS

Dear PW,

Thanx as usual for a *great* magazine 22, you only get better (except I used to really like the multicolored printing-but the boss's photocopier didn't, so black is OK!)

Lucius Cabins' "Dollars and Ecology" is a tonic for the troops! I'm fuckin' fed up with wimpy greenies. The paragraph beginning "instead of stepping back..." down in the LH bottom of page 9 says it all baby! I like this critical stance you take on lots of issues-the mainstream left gets fat and sloppy if we (anarchists, individuals, etc.) don't keep a close watch on their activities. Giant Sponge is "hot," too!

Our friend the VDT has been up (workers) and down (boss) a few times already in our lift. [Ed. Does this mean it was posted in an elevator ?] It's great to get value packed double pages like this instant agitation propaganda poster.

Our neglected cities—whilst being a bit too compromising and rationalist for me inspires me to send you another article from an Australian magazine—NEXUS—mostly full of soft core stuff and ads for NEW AGE SHIT but occasional value (like they had an article on Katya last issue too!). I'm sending them a copy of your Katya interview.

Idea for future issue there: the new age...I really do think that this is a big threat to the further development of human society (read: the revolution). A threat because it takes bits from

everywhere that are by themselves good—blends them together but casts it all in a mould of cappo-individualism that seems to go hand in glove with all this laissez-faire and New Right stuff. Like one crystal worshiper I was talking to the other day expressed the common New Age belief that "If you're sick its because you want to be sick. If you're unemployed its because you want to be unemployed, therefore no sickpay, no dole!"

As Shirly Mclean [sic] says you are your god so are responsible for everything happening to you. Forget Capitalism forget Socialism forget even Unionism it's all based on Individualism and so lets all these get-rich-quick "Herbalife" etc. piggy-back on top of good alternative lifestyle ideas.

Just like we should criticize the Eco-professionals, I would like to see PW look at the New Age professionals and its implications. Basically the cooption of solid leftist stuff by the far right!

I'm not expressing myself clearly at all here, but I've got this idea & its a passionate one—perhaps you can see my point. One day I'll find a words person to work with me (a radio worker) 'cos when I get them words together, boy am I gonna make the scathingest satirical attack on the New Age/Right ever. Get the musicians—I mean Windham Hill is a pretty easy target for theft!

Oh yeah loved "Learning Curve" too. Just today news is coming about

people working to privatise the jails over here in Australia. I was outraged that anyone could suggest such a thing and then I read "L.C." and talked to a friend about it who told me that the U.S. already has privatized jails. FUCK ME! No wonder the statistics show a lower rate of recidivism to those for-profit places: they must be scary.

Also the Dante quote & graffix on pg. 43 V. nice. I love all this stuff—as I said instant posters. Your work is joyfully plundered by local propagandists—hopefully the few graffics I have sent will put a little back your way.

I could go on but 2 pages is probably enough—sorry to authors & artists I missed but what I am saying is I like the PW collective's output in general. Like I'm a pushbike commuter (or at least when the RSIs behaving itself [Repetitive Stress Syndrome]) so anything on bikes I'm gonna like.

STAND FAST HANG IN BE STRONG HOLD ON

—SW(2)T New South Wales
Australia

P.S....why not do a songs/poems/ graffix of protest issue. Have written some originals, happy to contribute also want to cover other peoples' stuff.

P.P.S. Talcott's "Friday" poem cracked me up completely on the bus this morning—started looking out for that blue chevvy.

AutoDestruction Response

Dear PW,

Your material on "autodestruction" certainly spoke to one of my long-standing pet peeves. Dependency on the automobile as the way to meet our need to get around has become so total in the postwar era and yet it is so destructive: Air pollution from exhausts, "greenhouse" effect from mass world-wide combustion of fossil fuels, the highest fatality-per-passenger-mile rate of any mode of transport, inefficiency of energy use compared with electric rail systems or even buses, the acceptance of thousands of deaths and injuries yearly from automobiles as if this were "inevitable", the gobbling up of formerly productive farm lands outside cities for the building of ugly sprawl, all the wasted space devoted to parking lots and ever-more-congested roads, the atomizing of city life as public areas such as sidewalks are depopulated in favor of each individual in his/her car, etc.

Growing up in Los Angeles in the years after World War II, I constantly heard the refrain that this auto-organized world was the "inevitable line of progress." As a youngster I wasn't yet able to articulate counter-arguments to this universal blather, but I knew in my gut something was wrong.

In fact it is not too difficult to see that a different sort of direction would have been technically possible—even for Los Angeles, that city that has come to personify, perhaps more than any other, the postwar trend of auto-mania and suburban sprawl.

I remember the miles of farmland—devoted to walnut orchards, etc.—in the San Fernando Valley in the '50s, mile after mile of orange groves along two-lane, tree-lined roads in Orange County, the extensive marshlands along the Orange County coast, and the vineyards and small wineries in the country stretching east of Los Angeles towards San Bernardino. All of this is now gone, totally transformed by uncontrolled land speculation. By the late '60s the air had become so rancid the remaining citrus trees in outlying areas were dying and, in any case, the growers were eyeing the potential profits from land sales as the approaching freeways made suburban development an immediate "opportunity."

The Sepulveda Flood Control Basin near Van Nuys gives an idea of what could have been done: As a spillover area in case of flash floods, a chunk of

the San Fernando Valley has been preserved in its original state, with its annual harvest of pumpkins and other produce. There is no reason that large swaths of land between the towns on the Southern California coastal plain could not have been preserved as permanent agricultural conservancies, just as the Sepulveda Basin has been. Instead of endless suburban sprawl consuming the whole coastal plain like a cancer, development might have been concentrated in increasingly dense urban areas along rail lines.

As far as transportation is concerned, Los Angeles already had in place in the '40s an "interurban" rail system that, if it had been suitably improved and expanded, could have provided at least the beginnings of an alternative to the private automobile. "Interurban" was the term for a type of trolley system that was very common in the U.S. of A. through the '30s but virtually extinct today. Unlike a conventional streetcar system, which typically has its tracks in street pavement within a city, an "interurban" typically runs mostly on private right of way to outlying towns and suburbs. These rights of way were particularly important because they made it possible for trains to operate over longer distances at higher speeds, and would enable a system to be more easily upgraded to rapid transit as warranted by increasing urban density.

Be ForE

GRAPHIC BY MOAMMAR CRAWDADDY

It is hard to imagine today, but L.A. was the center of the world's largest "interurban"—the Pacific Electric "Red Car" system, which was still carrying passengers over 900 miles of track as late as 1950.

In the postwar era, Southern California real estate speculators could depend upon the government to provide massive subsidies for their profiteering schemes through freeway, street and utility construction, etc. But at the turn of the century the real estate developers had to provide for the transport and utility needs of residents themselves. The "Red Car"

system, thus, had been built as an adjunct to the real estate ventures of H.E. Huntington, heir of one of the Southern Pacific "robber barons." (People who've seen the movie "Chinatown" may recall that L.A. businessmen of that era also did occasionally make use of government subsidies—in that case, the construction of the Owens Valley aqueduct, which vastly increased the value of land owned by Huntington and his pals in the desert-like San Fernando Valley. But at that time water was as far as government responsibility had evolved.)

L.A.'s "Red Car" system always had to be subsidized by other, more profitable ventures because, in fact, the system was always unprofitable. In 1911 Southern Pacific bought out Huntington. S.P. wanted to make sure the huge freight traffic generated by P.E. went east over its own rails and not those of competitors such as Santa Fe. During the 42 years that the "Red Car" lines were operated under S.P. auspices (1911-1953), Pacific Electric only declared a profit in eight years: 1912-13, 1923, 1942-45 and 1948. The profit in 1942-45 was due to war-time restrictions on private auto travel (gas rationing, etc.). The marginal profit in 1948 was due to a fare hike—which only resulted in further ridership losses the following year, and a return to red ink. The losses would have been worse without



the profits from freight-hauling.

Nowadays the business class has grudgingly resigned itself to the reality that public transport of people in cities must be subsidized, especially after it was rendered hopelessly unprofitable in the postwar era by the huge government subsidies to a competing form of transport (autos). But even back in the '20s and '30s the public transit industry was not profitable enough to attract the capital that would have been required for massive rapid transit improvements needed to keep up with urban development and competitive pressure

from the auto industry.

Public transit has been chronically underfunded essentially because it is a public good—it provides all sorts of side benefits on top of the value to the individual passenger of each particular ride. These benefits accrue to the various businesses, landowners and government and private agencies located along the rail lines. But the "Red Car" system had no right, under the prevailing capitalist setup, to go to those organizations and say, "Reimburse us for the service we provide." The rail system could only get revenue from selling something it could privately control: rides.

"public good." So the logic of the private enterprise, market system naturally leads to degradation of the air quality.

Because "Red Car" passenger operations were unprofitable, its owner (S.P.) had no incentive to invest in improvements. Like any other capitalist outfit, S.P. is going to put its capital where it has the best chance to grow. The result was that S.P. simply refused to rebuild worn-out tracks (except for certain lines that had a high volume of freight traffic) and refused to buy new cars.

By the late '40s the tracks on many of the lines were in awful shape—

Sears department store on Pico Boulevard). But as early as 1904 a private right of way had been acquired for a subway from downtown to Vineyard through neighborhoods that have since become the most densely populated area in Southern California. A proposal to construct that subway as a federally-funded public works project at the height of the Great Depression carried a \$19 million pricetag (that's about \$184 million in 1986 dollars). After the Venice line was abandoned in 1950 the unused subway right of way was sold off for apartment house construction. Vineyard was converted into—what else?—a shopping center.

A system that works on the basis of short-term private profits ends up doing all sorts of short-sighted stupidities. The failure to carry out the numerous rapid transit improvements proposed for the "Red Car" system in the '20s, '30s and '40s has proved to be one of the most obvious stupidities in hindsight.

The last "Red Car" line—the line to Long Beach, abandoned in 1961—is now being rebuilt on the very same right of way at a cost of almost half a billion dollars.

Moreover, the service will be inferior to what could have been provided on even a moderately improved "Red Car" system. That's because they no longer have the 4-track mainline which enabled the longer-distance trains to run non-stop on the center two tracks for the seven miles from downtown to Watts while Watts locals made the numerous stops on the outside tracks to service residents of the neighborhoods along the way. The new "light rail" trains will have to make numerous stops through these neighborhoods which will lengthen the travel time to Long Beach.

My point here is that a particular technological direction—increasingly total auto-dependence—was not "inevitable" but came about because certain other possible directions of technological development were closed off by the logic of capitalist development. The author of your article cites the efforts of National City Lines to dismantle trolley systems in the U.S. Though National City Lines did take over the conventional streetcar system in central L.A. (another company founded by H.E. Huntington, called Los Angeles Railway), they did not take over the Pacific Electric lines, contrary to the popular myth. I think we can trace this myth back to the

after



GRAPHIC BY MOAMMAR CRAWDADDY

Or, to put the same point in another way, the auto-manufacturers, petroleum-refiners, suburban developers and other companies profiting from the transition to an auto-dependent society did not have to pay the social costs of auto-dependency that have now become much more obvious than they were back in the '30s and '40s (now that we're choking on them). A built-in defect of a capitalist economy is that there are many costs and benefits to society that are not adequately reflected in the money that changes hands through the countless private transactions that makes up the money economy.

Companies could, for example, use up the clean air (by polluting it) without having to pay for it (until belated government regulations began to impose some token costs). Or, to put it the other way, if a company spent a lot of money to avoid polluting the air, it couldn't then go to everyone and say, "Pay us for this expense we've incurred." They couldn't do so because clean air, like a good public transit system, is a

typically, trains were running on the original rail laid down at the turn of the century. As government subsidies to auto transport increased, thousands of grade crossings had been cut through the rights of way, which posed a hazard that required slower operating speeds. In the older, central part of Los Angeles the lines operated in congested city streets, which slowed down operation considerably.

A technical solution existed for these problems. The P.E. operations could have been upgraded to rapid transit through incremental improvements. Viaducts could have been built to carry tracks over street crossings and subways could have been built to replace the streetcar tracks in the more densely built areas, like downtown L.A.

For example, the main problem facing the lines to the western beach communities was the use of streetcar tracks for the first five miles out of downtown. The private right of way began at a major junction and rail yard called "Vineyard" (in back of the

Yet, there is an element of truth to the myth: The outfit that did take over the "Red Car" remnants (Metropolitan Coach Lines) was headed by a former National City Lines manager with the same anti-rail orientation and backed by the same auto and petroleum interests. Nonetheless, though MCL did dismantle two of the lines (they shut down L.A.'s trolley subway in 1955), I don't think we can explain what happened by seeing it as a "conspiracy" of certain big monopolists. Of the 18 "Red Car" lines that still existed in early 1950, 12 had already been shutdown by the time MCL entered the picture in '53. For example, S.P. abandoned the six lines of the "Northern District" (to San Gabriel Valley destinations such as Pasadena) in 1951; S.P.'s excuse was its reluctance to spend \$125,000 to relocate track to get around freeway construction in downtown L.A.

Private auto ownership held the promise of personal mobility. As an increasing proportion of the workforce owned automobiles, the potential constituency for a highway-oriented policy expanded. The postwar transformation of Southern California was only just beginning, and, thus, the rancid air quality and daily traffic frustrations of today were still in the future. And S.P. took the position that it could not be asked to shoulder financial losses so that rights of way would be preserved for some future time when the political climate might change.

the area—both liberals and conservatives—left the criterion of profitability unchallenged and thus accepted the destruction of the "Red Car" system as "inevitable."

This failure of the political system remained to the end: The last four lines — the "Southern District" lines to Watts, Long Beach, San Pedro and Bellflower—were shut down by the State of California (under the liberal administration of Pat Brown) after it took over L.A.'s transit systems in 1958. The political system is dominated by the perceived needs and values of the business community, and so it should not be surprising that it tends to go along with "business as usual."

The decline, and eventual destruction, of the "Red Car" system happened precisely because it was *unprofitable*, not because of a "conspiracy" of auto interests. Capitalism isn't run as a conspiracy of bad guys in a back room. What happens in the system is due to the particular way it is put together—domination of everything by market exchange and money, having to sell yourself to live, the criterion of profitability governing everything. It is precisely this social organization that accounts for the degradation of public transportation in 20th century America.

D.W. replies:

[illegible]

Dear Processed World,

be recognized and to have an effect, but that was up against something bigger than we could put back, basically global destruction by clearcutting. Many were the times that I would be literally in tears and sobbing as I drove into large clearcut areas such as the Shelton Ranger District (Washington) or the eastern side of the Cascades, where we experienced that "act of God [*sic*]" under the famed St. Helens cloud of ash. In areas such as these, clearcutting happens in rocky areas that will never reproduce the former stands of trees.

Perhaps the only critique I can offer is that I got a sense that Med-O, perhaps because of his current isolation from direct action of this kind, tends to underestimate our impact on the forestry industry as a whole. The idea of women flashing breasts at a fuzz-brained inspector was humorous and certainly had its consciousness-raising effects on the inspector, but I think that this example is merely symbolic of a larger consciousness-raising effect on the overall industry that Med-O downplayed. The forestry industry and the individuals who run it are in general dense and greedy, and they do things in a macho, destructive, uncontrolled fashion. I think that our presence as workers, however limited, has given them a glimmer of how environmentally correct the use of resources could be.

For example, slash burning is a key insane practice that is being challenged, and if it is stopped, could have a dramatic effect on how forestry land is managed. On a number of other issues, too, including pesticides (which Med-O talks about), undocumented workers, specifications of contracts, selective cutting, alder management, conifer release, sustaining the cooperative movement, and performance of inspectors, the cooperative forestry movement should be recognized as a group of people who decided to rebel against the status quo, and, come what may, however briefly in an historical sense, significantly challenged and changed the ideas within an industry entrenched in unenlightened destruction. Yes, worker/owners do "manage" their own exploitation, but within their action, they carry the seed of consciousness transformation that is the essential ingredient of effective revolutions.

continued on page 42

WE AIN'T WORKING ON MAGGIE'S FARM NO MORE!

A collaboration by Lucius Cabins, Adam Cornford, Green Fuchsia, and Med-o, the text below appeared in a leaflet Processed World distributed at the "Greening of the West" conference held this fall in the coastal mountains south of San Francisco (a version of this leaflet also circulated at an Earth First gathering held earlier in Northern California). Controversy quickly surrounded our entre to the conference (see "Movement of Substance or Fiber?").

The text takes up major issues that the Greens largely ignore. We support wilderness struggles worldwide. But a direct defense of remote flora, fauna, and natural resources against "development" is not an immediately accessible political expression for most who live in or around cities.

The reclaiming and restoration of our cities are as crucial as struggles in the hinterlands. The struggle for viable urban ecologies—not necessarily those prefigured by the vegetarian diets, natural fiber wardrobes, Windham Hill music and other preferences of the flourishing Green consumer subculture—is an exciting prospect and a challenge to our collective imagination. These struggles will involve contests for political and economic power, topics about which many Greens remain silent (see "Dollars and Ecology: Different Shades of Green?" in Processed World 22). For most of us at Processed World, the "green thing" has emerged as fertile political ground because it suggests a way to give positive content to an alternative social agenda. It is a way that could engage and even "reemploy" countless office and technology workers whose creative energies are currently stifled, or squandered, processing the fiscal alchemy that is late capitalism.

The time has come to explore the perspectives raised below. In fact, we are in the primitive stages of planning an urban ecology conference in San Francisco for fall 1989. Perhaps you, like many of us, are a "wannabe Green"—feeling excluded by, yet attracted to, Green politics. Please write us with your ideas, donations (payable to Bay Area Center for Art and Technology), and help. We promise a conference that is neither boring nor humorless.

—D.H.

The Greens' combination of electoral politics, direct action tactics, and relatively decentralized, non-hierarchical organization has made an important contribution to the fight against the corporate-government leviathan destroying our biosphere. But activists remain far from gaining the power to really alter the world's suicidal course. That power can only come from an urban, work-based movement able to contest the economy's fundamental internal logic.

Creating such a movement means first of all dropping the seemingly irresistible urge to guilt-trip people who haven't embraced eco-asceticism. Certainly, mindless consumption is a problem on which recycling, prudent buying habits, and boycotts can have some impact. However, atomized individual consumers are not the core of the problem, nor are they the key to the solution. In the first place, large corporate and governmental entities (like the military) are by far the greatest polluters and resource pillagers. Secondly, attacking consumption on the basis of individual guilt fails to acknowledge the incredibly narrow range of lifestyle choices available to most people in the global capitalist system. This tack places emphasis on the very limited power of consumer "choice" rather than on people's real social power as producers.

Changing our course requires new insights about the world we would like to live in, how we would like to function in that world, and how what we do now is an impediment to reaching our goals. If we merely adopt simplicity and

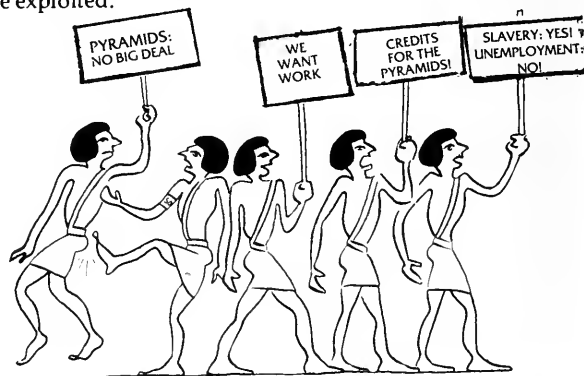
moderation as our watchwords and fail to bring new concepts of wealth and the good life into the movement's vision, a widening of participation across class, race, and cultural lines to include those who have never attained affluence is highly unlikely.

"Work First!" Means "Earth Second!"

Instead of a broad-based discussion on how to formulate economic goals that respect both natural and human needs, we hear talk of "community-based economics." This amounts to little more than a plan for small business associations, albeit frequently based on employee ownership. Although there are of course ecological advantages to economic localism, such localism in itself does not challenge the logic of the market, nor can it contest the really large blocs of capital—IBM, General Motors, the USSR—that control the global marketplace. Not even worker ownership marks a break with market relationships, since worker cooperatives will have to achieve the same level of productive efficiency as the giants do to compete successfully. Worker-owners will either have to speed themselves up or lay themselves off.

Worker cooperatives will need to yield the same profit margins as other businesses to survive, and they will be faced with the same tradeoffs between ecology and economics that other businesses are faced with. The pressure to compromise the environment to get a higher rate of profit will be enormous.

While "community-based" companies strive to accumulate capital locally, the people working in them remain wage laborers. This is the heart of the problem. The continued control of production by closed, profit-oriented economic units employing workers motivated largely by direct material rewards spawns a culture centered on material acquisition. And nature is reduced to a set of resources to be exploited.



A Systemic Poison

As individuals, we have virtually no say over the purpose of the time for which we are paid. After working all week making one product or another—be it computer code, automobiles, or windmills—we get our money and then, we are told, *that's when our freedom begins!* Yet it is during those unfree hours on the job that we most actively participate in the ecological devastation of the world.

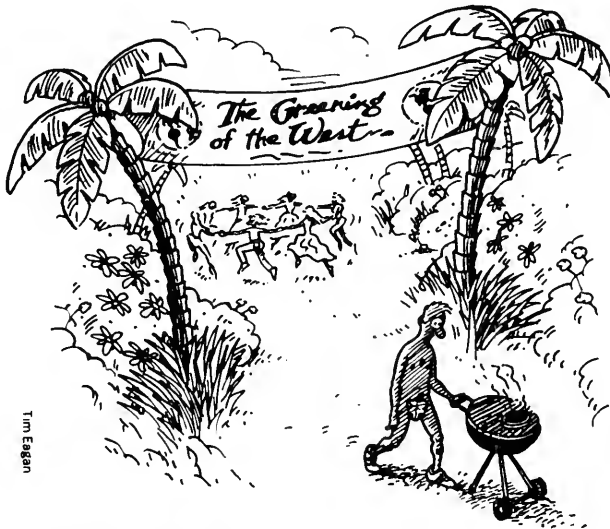
We cannot escape by finding a "good job." The problem is systemic. You might not personally dump toxics in the local water supply, but your work is linked to a chain of ecologically destructive actions. You might, for instance, be a secretary/word processor for a manufacturer of processed health foods. While on the job, you use computer equipment whose production entailed leaching toxics into the Santa Clara Valley water table. The reams of paper your printer cranks out are made from trees clearcut from diminishing forests. Most importantly, the making of granola bars and other pseudo-wholesome foods "your" company churns out involves all sorts of noxious effects, from release of greenhouse gases during manufacture of the plastic wrappers to massacre of plant and insect species by "scientific" agriculture.

Today, work is not only killing us as workers—it is killing the planet. All work processes and technologies should be evaluated according to their effects on their users, on their immediate surroundings, and on the long-term health of the biosphere. Last, but definitely not least, production must be justified by the intrinsic value it has for human communities.

"People First!" Means "Nature First!"

The tendency to romanticize nature while denigrating human beings is the greatest impediment Greens face in trying to organize a mass radical ecological movement. An appreciation of the capacity for growth that nature has bestowed on humanity is, in contrast, the first step toward gaining the support Green politics so richly deserves. Greens need to understand the strength of the confining fetters wage labor and its attendant materialism impose on human thought. Once those fetters are removed, an ethical system that encourages creative cooperation between free human beings could arise, and human beings could take their place as the self-conscious expression of the natural system as a whole.

Strategically, Greens should take advantage of the cultural crucible city life represents instead of rejecting urbanization as antiecollogical. Modern cities, because of their

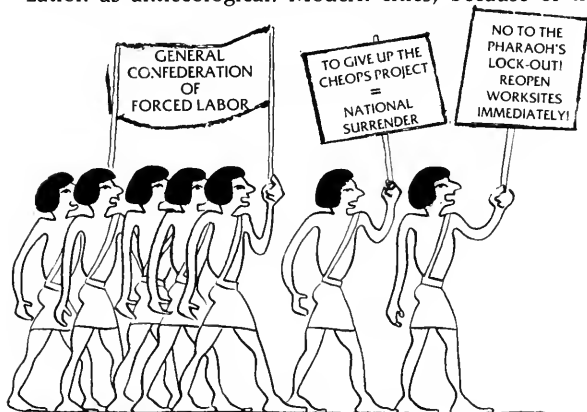


A Movement of Substance or Fiber?

Processed World and friends caused a stir in the miso soup line at the "Greening of the West" conference, which attracted over one thousand participants (by organizer's estimates). The cartoon shown here accompanied an article in the San Jose Metro, a Silicon Valley weekly. In his "Green Eggs and Miso," journalist Hal Plotkin opened and closed with an anecdote featuring an unnamed PWR (Lucius Cabins) lamenting the strictly vegetarian menu at the outdoor cafeteria. (While not explicitly banning meat, the conference issued restrictions on tobacco and alcohol consumption.) During the week following the conference, and exchange satirizing the gathering's "vegetable hegemony" appeared over an electronic mail "net" at a large Silicon Valley electronics corporation. In the subsequent issue of Metro, a reader attacked journalist Plotkin for "trivializing" the conference. The letter claimed that the gathering "was not about miso soup, magic mushrooms or discrimination against meat eaters; rather, it was a celebration of the continued growth of a spirited movement whose time has come."

In fact, many of us felt excluded by much of the discussion, if not the conference, which lacked the sense of hope and especially the energy of a movement. Standing firmly by our meat preferences (actually, we're omnivores; our beef is not with vegetarian diets but with vegetarians whose politics preclude carnivores), we retreated on Saturday evening to a picnic site (in "McDonald" State Park) outside the conference where we roasted our steaks, chops, sausages, and breasts and talked about our desires for an urban-based green gathering: a "Wannabe Green" conference.

—D.H.



concentration of people with diverse backgrounds, provide unparalleled opportunities for the development and dissemination of new ideas. Besides being cultural centers, metropolitan areas are also economic centers. They are where the exploitative relationship between humans and nature originates. Only urban workers have the power to seize control of the work machine and stop it from rolling over the Earth, ourselves, and all living things.

Fortunately, past workers' movements provide a rich legacy of antihierarchical forms and ingenious tactics: direct democracy, coordination by recallable delegates, slowdowns, sabotage, occupations. . . The popular backing the new left received in the sixties demonstrated the enormous appeal libertarian ideas have in this country while in the eighties, the forces of liberty are on the rise from Moscow to Manila, Seoul to Soweto. The Green movement desperately needs this rebellious energy. To become more than a marginal force, Greens have to realize that respect for nature and human liberation go hand in hand.

ESPRIT

DE CORPSE

"It's like if I see a fat, ugly girl walking down the street in an Esprit sweatshirt. I don't want that kind of advertising."

Doug Tompkins, co-owner of Esprit.

The substance of fashion is in its perception. The designer sees the design refracted through the consumers' eyes. The world of fashion is also one of contradictions and illusion. Ordinary people doing ordinary things become extraordinary; advertisement and ideology become blurred. Dreams and dollars collide and scatter new fashions and forms in their wake.

A case in point is Esprit de Corp. It is a dream: of its owners—or perhaps the label "parents" better describes Doug and Susie Tompkins—its consumers and the fashion oracles. It practices what it preaches and it never never tells the truth.

Which came first: The current marital problems of the Esprit owners or the divergent views of the company's product? This is perhaps a conundrum on the order of the egg and the chicken, for the polarity of their relation has to all accounts been part and parcel of both success and failure.

The company is virulently anti-union, a feeling dating back to the Tompkins' creation of the Great Chinese American Sewing Co. in San Francisco. Following an ILGWU attempt at organizing, the Tompkins fired a worker who signed a union card, and then closed the plant entirely. The union won a law suit (after 10 years) and collected \$1.25 million in back wages. Since then, Esprit has relocated its production to offshore trade zones. Apparently the workers who actually produce the clothes are excluded from the mandate of former Senior Vice President Thomas Moncho: "It's a sin here not to develop your potential."

Esprit retail clerks must look elsewhere for development subsidies: the hourly wage (in 1987) at the SF store (gross sales of \$20 million) is a munificent \$5.00—down from \$5.50! The salesworkers are sold discounted shirts, but are required to wear black slacks and dark socks and shoes.

"These are not clothes for people who sit behind desks every day and hate their jobs."

Tom Direnzo, Esprit outlet manager.



The designers of image, however, fared better—the corporate headquarters boasts many amenities, as well as subsidized vacations and the use of company facilities. Perhaps the method to this discrimination is found in the effort to shape The Image, which is everything in this business.

The image began to tarnish in late 1986, as problems emerged. Said one observer, "Suddenly Esprit ran into this incredible wall of consumer resistance." Although sales remained flat, profits fell by 80. The expansion into retail stores foundered; overseas sales were doing well (in places like Chile), but remitted insufficient funds to the home office. There have been wholesale replacements of personnel at senior levels, the introduction of executives from other fashion companies, and a new sales force. With the prospect of reduced profits, the company showed its professional staff the same courtesies it had previously bestowed only on garment workers—a 30' layoff, wages and bonus reductions, warehouse closings, and extensive "perk" rollbacks. Employees now buy their own coffee and pay for personal phone calls. The days are gone when a manager, considered to be "negative and burnt out," would be sent on a European trip in the hope that she would conclude that she no longer belonged at Esprit.

According to Susie, "Doug has always known we'd get through... he doesn't ever think things will get out of his control."

And control is indeed a central concept here. Says Patagonia owner Yvon Chouinard, one of Mr. Tompkins' closest friends, "Doug is not an Evel Knievel type. Before he jumps, he knows he can do it." Behind the "carefree" and "breezy" look of the fashion, behind the amicable surroundings and benevolent attentions is an overpowering need for domination and an almost obsessive attention to detail.

He once told his workers, "If I ask you what books you've read to stimulate your brains, what adventures you've had... what love affair was fulfilling...like good coaches, we want answers and actions." Of his alleged "septigon" of sexual relationships among Esprit employees, according to author Leonard Koren, "He believes that if you want to harness [sic] the entire employee, you have to engage the entire being." Could it be the emperor of old fashioned harassment and self-indulgence dressed up in new age clothes?

Management style differs as much as Image management, with Ms. Tompkins favoring a more "career" look, maturing the line with the customer. Says she, "I'm the product person and that's what I fight for." She professes to have outgrown the leisure lifestyle,

and she is deeply concerned with AIDS and the homeless (wouldn't it be "nice" if her concern extended to Esprit's far-flung employees?).

Mr. Tompkins continues to look to youth as the icon of fashion and sex. He prefers the vision of Esprit's photographer Olivero Toscani, saying "This company will never have a career orientation. Will I listen to Toscani before I listen to Susie? You bet. He's the image maker and she isn't."

Said Corrado Federico, chief operating officer of Esprit's flagging fortunes, "You can have all the image and panache in the world, but without substance forget it." Substance, in the world of fashion?

Come with us now into the twilight between image and reality.
— by P. Morales



The chic tanned receptionist took in my surplus pea coat and weathered boots with disdainful curiosity, wondering what might possess this rustic intruder to pose as a new employee of Esprit De Corp., San Francisco's home-grown fashion capital. Indeed I felt none too sure myself. My career plans hardly included typing business letters for the trendsetter of flashy fashions for the 1980's. But as I explained to the young woman, I was a mere transient in the church of trendiness having been taken aboard as a temporary word processor.

Once admitted to the inner sanctum, I saw immediately that the creator of Esprit had no love of things conventional. Esprit is the mission control of haute couture: a cathedral-like assemblage of glass walls and redwood beams; every chair made of wicker and every desk made of oak; and resting appropriately atop each, state-of-the-art computers of all shapes and sizes.

Yet Esprit is far more than bold architecture—it is a sort of corporate utopia. It boasts its own gourmet cafe, a greenhouse, a small park, even a lawn tennis court (the only one in Northern California). On its walls hangs perhaps the world's foremost collection of Amish quilts, as well as exhibits of photos from exotic lands. To keep all this impeccable

and orderly, Esprit hires full-time landscapers, carpenters, even an architect or two. And moving gracefully through this stylish complex like brightly-colored tropical fish are the Esprit executives themselves: predominantly healthy lithe, nubile, young women, attired in bold, modern styles and chic Italian shoes (to keep them healthy, lithe and nubile Esprit employs a full-time fitness director).

As if to cement my first impressions, my smiling Esprit coworkers happily informed me that all the rave media reviews (*Newsweek*, *Us Magazine*, and so forth) of Esprit are true. I was told that Esprit is a progressive company that cares about its workers; that it hires diverse, "international" people; that it believes in health and youthful vigor; and that it is a darn fun place to work where employees dress and act just as they wish (so long as they're stylish). And what's more 'exciting'—Esprit is on the verge of becoming a fashion empire like Levi-Strauss. In addition to some 2,000 San Francisco employees, Esprit has set up shop in over twenty foreign countries.

But the more I saw, the more doubtful I became. Whisk aside the saccharine Esprit public relations and you find something quite unglamorous: an old-fashioned, anti-union, anti-worker

company run by a man who discriminates against the old and unattractive, who has no qualms about doing business in South Africa and Chile, and whose success is based on paying slave wages to foreign textile workers.

The spiritual and financial force behind Esprit is Doug Tompkins, the 45-year old president and owner (along with wife Susie) of the company. Baby-faced, silver-haired, trim and tanned, he seems the distillation of the Esprit ideal: fun-loving, lighthearted, yet success-oriented. In keeping with Esprit's 'fitness' consciousness, he spends only about half the year on the job. The rest of the time he jaunts around the world to climb mountains, run rapids, and consort with other high-powered fashion industry types.

Yet like most everything else at Esprit, the real Doug Tompkins sharply contrasts with the image of Doug Tompkins. Doug master-minded the image of the friendly, happy Espriter, yet he remains aloof and enigmatic to his workers. Most Esprits refer to him as "Doug," but few know him well enough to say hello. He occasionally dines with upper-echelon employees, but he scarcely notices the rank and file, and he smiles only in photographs. His employees reason that the pressures of the industry keep him preoccupied. In

any event, most agree that his diffidence is surely not symptomatic of low self-esteem.

Despite the fact that Doug spends little time at Esprit, he controls the cosmetic details of the premises with totalitarian fervor. Doug demands final approval of any new furnishings, lighting, even small accessories like typing stands.

Another cosmetic detail to which Doug pays inordinate attention is hiring policy. When I first arrived at Esprit, I asked a coworker why everyone looked under 21. She shrugged, assuring me that many were closer to 25 (she herself was 19). Almost without exception Esprit hires the bright, cheery-faced young people you might see in Club Med ads. It is easy to imagine that Esprit manufactures its cute employees in Hong Kong right alongside its cotton v-necks and acetate skirts. The assembly line does not, however, tend to produce

many blacks, hispanics or middle-aged employees.

Whatever their age or race, the company treats all workers the same: like children. High-heeled shoes are banned (ostensibly they could damage the wooden floor); workers are forbidden to bring snacks or open beverages near the work area (special mugs with hinged lids are provided); workers may not wear clothing with flashy logos other than Esprit, etc. With all the rules, Esprit could easily be mistaken for a boarding school. On the wall in the cafe hangs a framed aphorism that sums up the atmosphere of the place; "Please pick up after yourself, your mother doesn't work here."

In fact, your mother couldn't get a job here—she would be too old. But more to the point, your mother wouldn't want to work at Esprit for fear of breaking her neck. It is a good thing indeed that Esprit stresses youth and fitness, be-

cause Esprters must be agile and well coordinated to avoid slipping down the narrow stairways of polished wood. Workers say that Doug refuses to mar their treacherous beauty with traction strips (just about everyone recalls falling down the stairs at least once).

Likewise, Esprters must be quick-witted enough to dodge a glass partition now and then (Doug believes in the illusion of openness and communication among workers, and thus installed glass walls. The glass also offers the advantage of exhibiting Doug's stable of colorful employees—rather like a Macy's window display). Visitors at Esprit, conspicuous by their clumsiness, often see walls materialize within inches of their faces, which is usually too late.

And if invisible walls and slippery stairs aren't enough to keep Esprters agile and alert, there are the wicker chairs, which sounds harmless enough until you have sat in one for a day. Only then do you

DESPRIT!

NOT JUST ANOTHER LOOK

Desperate about your image? So are we about your acquiring it. Our top fashion designers tell why:

"Designing DESPRIT! looks? Easy! We just coll in the specs to Panang or Singapore, their sweatshops do the rest."

"You might say I design as compulsively as the upscale, alienated youth accumulate DESPRIT! wardrobes—it's something to do!"

"Do our customers really need another acid-washed denim jacket? A second mauve stone-washed workshirt? Do I need therapy?"

HYDROCHLORIC ACID

A WHOLE NEW WAY TO POSE



realize that Espriter must have especially strong backs, since their chairs give no support whatsoever. Esprit once supplied workers with dull, old office chairs but Doug tossed them out in favor of the cute but rickety wicker. Workers sometimes complain of chronic backaches but are promptly reminded that at Esprit image is everything.

Of course, if you think about it, image is not everything. It is mere illusion. Yet Doug Tompkins and Esprit have bravely ventured beyond the realm of image and into the realm of the callous. Back in 1974, a youthful Esprit celebrated its puberty by locking out some 125 manual workers at the company-owned Great Chinese American Sewing Company in Chinatown. This magnanimous step was taken because the workers wanted to join a union. After a lengthy legal battle, the National Labor Relations Board awarded the workers \$1.25 million in back wages. Tompkins, however, is not a man who likes being told how to run his business. Esprit moved its manufacturing overseas mostly to the Far East where workers know their place.

Doing business in repressive nations has subsequently become something of a crusade for Tompkins. Not only does Esprit conduct a thriving business in South Africa and Chile, but Tompkins has also launched the "American Free Trade Council," an organization that lobbies for the lofty principle of, what else, free trade. Despite its noble ideals, Esprit refuses to comment on any of this. Either the company does not wish

to brag of good works, or its spokesmen are fearful of the provision in the company manual threatening dismissal for any negative statements made to the press.

The best way to describe the brave new world at Esprit is, in fact, 'see no evil, hear no evil.' Whatever its shortcomings, Esprit continues to be inundated with resumes from credulous young grads who are attracted to the company's image. Esprit is even now planning to build a "campus-like Esprit City" for its deserving executives. And Esprit continues to present itself as a populist organization by using 'real people' in its ads (which greatly cuts down on modeling costs).

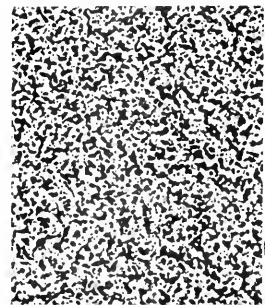
Such a real person is Ariel O'Donnell, a San Francisco waitress who had the good fortune of serving Doug and Susie one evening. Over the next several days she was ushered into the Esprit headquarters for a photography session and an interview. Her face appeared in Esprit ads in *Mademoiselle*, *Glamour*, *Vanity Fair*, *Elle* and *Metropolitan Home*. The caption in the ads reads: Ariel O'Donnell, San Francisco, California. Age 21. Waitress/Bartender. Non-professional AIDS Educator. Cyclist. Art Restoration Student. Anglophile. Neo-Feminist. Clearly a model citizen of the Esprit utopia.

In fact, however, a 1987 issue of *Image* magazine reported O'Donnell's true biography like this: "Waitress, bartender and cyclist are factual descriptions. Non-professional AIDS educator and

neo-feminist, O'Donnell assumes, were extrapolations from her interview remark. 'No longer can we be sexually free. We have to be safe. So if I were sleeping with someone new, I'd insist he use a condom.' An interest in art restoration became 'art restoration student.'

From the perspective of history, all of this blurring of reality doesn't really matter—utopias don't usually last long. But Esprit is somehow above history. With its existence based on a gaseous cloud of image, Esprit has proven as resilient as superstition itself. Perhaps it's time to call an exorcist.

by Dan Herman



presents

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The first show of what promises to be a provocative and hilarious series. Hosted by HAL 9000, a fugitive computer, *Interference Television* derives much of its material and flavor from *Processed World* magazine, and offers a blistering look at the Underside of the Information Age.



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JR Swanson, whose wild graphic art has appeared regularly inside and on the covers (#16 & #20) of *Processed World*, has produced this surreal tale of bike messenger life in San Francisco, with a cast of thousands (of pigeons!). Originally shot in 16mm and edited on scavenged equipment, *LOY FREDDY* is a testament to suppressed creativity and hidden desires.

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Longtime *Processed World* readers will remember the themes plumbed in the Special Sex Issues (#7 & #18). PW co-founder Caitlin Manning breaks into video with this hour-long documentary, exploring the world of erotic entertainment. "The image emerging from the film is dialectical in the truest sense... these testimonials challenge pre-conceived notions of female workers as victims." —S.F. *Sentinel*



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PROCESSED

WORLD'S

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☐ **GENRES:** letters, graphics (from photo-montage to comix), poetry, short stories, biographs/tales of toil, analyses, interviews, literature & movie reviews...

☐ **LENGTH:** no more than 12 double-spaced typed pages. If it's longer go ahead and submit it, but we'll probably edit it.

☐ **EDITING:** we invariably do. More if it's non-fiction. Very little if it's fiction. None for poetry. We make every effort to obtain author's permission to make the edits. If you don't have a typewriter, we'll take handwritten material, but please keep it to a minimum. If you wrote something on a word-processor, please indicate what sort of machine; if we use your piece a copy on a disk saves us from retyping things. Feel free to contact us for more information.

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want it back). Indicate any restrictions/credits on use of material, as well as a pen name, if not your own. Let us know if it has been published before. On photos and graphics please put your name and address on the back of each.

—We like to publish provocative material.

—We don't take anything for granted.

—We prefer that you draw on your own experience although this is not a must. Let's just say that the more you do so, the better.

—We like a strong sense of humor, irony, or anger; we don't like rant and cant. We reserve the right to distinguish between the two.

—We detest obfuscation, categories, unsupported generalizations and anything that hides confused thinking; we'd rather explore the confusion.

—We are not a leftist or "anarchist"

periodical—whatever they are—so we don't traffic in leftist or anarchist buzzwords—whatever they mean. Despite this, leftists and anarchists—whatever they are—generally like our magazine.

—We focus on the fertile culture of daily life, its connections to larger concerns.

—Due to our production schedule, it may be months before a submission is used. We tend to keep things for a while, so keep us posted on address changes if you want your original.

—We pay nobody but the printer. We give you a complimentary copy for a submission (or extend your subscription, if any); we give 4 issues if we do use a piece. We can provide extra copies on request (within reason).

Processed World "The Magazine with a Bad Attitude" 41 Sutter Street #1829 SF CA 94104

YOU'VE GOT TO GIVE ME CREDIT

"The Nineties are going to be our decade," said Rick, over spinach salad at some too-expensive restaurant in Georgetown.

"I believe that," I said. "But first we have to get through the Eighties."

People wonder how I survive—financially, that is. It's simple in theory, though complicated in practical terms. I live on credit cards.

I know all America lives on credit cards, but I live on (almost) nothing else. I haven't had a full time job for four years now.

Annually I apply for more revolving credit on MasterCards (currently I have fifteen), Visas (21), Discovers (3), Choices (2), Optimas (2) and other bank credit lines that access checks (4).

At the moment I have \$137,550 in unsecured revolving credit from American banks.

At the moment I owe \$100,000 to them.

I also have about \$60,000 in CDs, money market deposit accounts, savings and checking accounts.

As long as I keep the credit-mobile going—by paying my credit accounts every month and then borrowing the money back—and as long as my credit limits keep getting raised to meet my needs, I do well.

Better than most people who work.

Jerry, a systems analyst at a firm where he's stayed on too long—three years—doesn't approve of what I'm doing. He and my other friends worry about me.

"You've got no security," he tells me over dinner—angel hair pasta with sun-dried tomatoes—at Marvin Gardens on Broadway and West 83rd.

Jerry's father worked at the post office for forty years. Now he plays handball every day.

"Besides, doesn't it terrify you owing all that money?" Jerry asks me.

"Does it terrify Ronald Reagan to be head of a country that has a trillion-dollar debt?" I ask.

"It's not the same thing," Jerry says.

I disagree.

Linda, editor-in-chief of a magazine for weight-watching women, tells me, "It all sounds a little sleazy," when we meet for brunch at the Fontainebleau in Miami Beach. She is in Florida on a stopover to a travel writer's tour of Costa Rica. Several times a year she gets these free trips from PR agencies, usually in exchange for a promise to write an article.

"I'm actually helping the American economy," I try to explain. "They're always worried about consumer growth slowing down. It's the consumers who have spent enough to make this recovery the longest one

since World War II. I keep money moving—borrowing on cash advances on one Visa, putting the money in the bank, paying back a MasterCard...I believe I'm behaving quite patriotically."

Linda doesn't buy it.

Well, I don't buy much myself, which, in fact, is the secret to my plan. I'm very, very cheap.

Unlike the Yuppies, who are patriotic in consumption, I hate to buy anything.

I haven't bought new clothes in several years. I have only one pair of running shoes, replaced every fifteen months or so at Kinney's. I don't own regular shoes. Unlike Jerry, I don't need suits, dress shirts or ties.

Carlyle, whose "Sartor Resartus" I was forced to read a dozen years ago, said one smart thing. To enlarge the fraction of life, he explained, you could either increase the numerator or decrease the denominator.

My denominator is very low.

And life really is a fraction, not a whole number. Otherwise the Yuppies would be right when they say your salary is life's report card. It's not. All numbers, even whole numbers, are fractions—the relationship of one number to another.

I figure I'm way ahead of everyone.

"But you lie when you apply for credit," Jerry says. The Fortune 500 corporation that he works for has recently been fined several million dollars by the federal government.

Jerry is right. I say I am the Director of Training of Information in Motion, Inc. and earn an annual gross salary of \$103,000. (If I had claimed to be something as high as Vice-President, they would have suspected I was self-employed—the kiss of death in the credit business.)

I suppose this is a crime, but I don't care.

Surviving the Eighties has made me a hardened criminal. Like it did to Ivan Boesky, Dennis B. Levine, Martin Siegal and the rest of the crowd on Wall Street.

In the summer of 1986, when stories comparing the frenzy of greed in this decade with that of the 1920s first began to appear, the First National Bank of Oklahoma failed. I had a MasterCard with them.

The bank I owed \$1,987.66 to went broke before I did.

They were taken over by First Interstate Bank. Now I have two MasterCards from First Interstate.

Since then two more banks I had credit cards with have been taken over by other banks to prevent them from failing.

Yes, I was once—literally, once—a respectable working man.

I got my first full-time job when I was thirty, in 1981. Prior to that, I had had numerous menial, minimum-wage jobs, and I had taught part-time at ten colleges in New York City. Once I taught seven courses at four colleges in one semester, spending fifteen hours a week grading papers on the subway. Then I got sick and couldn't work the next term. I had no health insurance because my jobs were part-time, and I couldn't get unemployment insurance because Truro still owed me money from a previous term; although I hadn't been rehired, I was still considered to be working for them.

In 1981 I moved to Florida and became a full-time, if temporary English instructor at a community college. I had to teach fifteen hours a week, thirty-nine weeks a year. I taught composition and remedial writing to twelve sections of twenty-eight students each.

The Florida legislature mandated that

I keep fifteen office hours a week in addition to my teaching hours. They also required my students to write 6,000 words each semester. Our department chairman told us to get a clear and accurate word count on each paper, because eventually the state would get around to auditing us.

Thus, I had to grade 6,000 words for each of 140 students during the year, or 140 five-hundred word themes weekly, at five minutes per paper...well, you can figure it out.

In 1981, my annual gross salary was \$13,216.87.

I prefer living on credit.

I was able, by virtue of being a full-time employee, to get my first Visa from the First National Bank of Atlanta with a \$700 credit line. Now I have a \$3,000 credit line from them, or rather from the First Atlanta Bank (Delaware), N.A., the new owner of my debt.

Several dozen Visas and MasterCard later, I've learned a lot about the banking business. Every month I go to



UNCLE SAM TALKS TOUGH WITH TODAY'S TEENS.

the main library in whatever city I'm living in and read the month's copies of "American Banker", a daily paper put out by the American Bankers Association.

A few years ago, at a college friend's wedding, I was seated with the singles and was talking to a guy who was counsel to the House Banking Committee. In the middle of our conversation, he stopped and said, "I thought Mark and Amy said you were a writer."

"I am a writer," I told him.

"You talk like a banking insider," he said.

You can be both, I've discovered.

I know about the FDIC, the FOMC, the FSLIC, the FHLBB, the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency, non-bank banks, MMDAs and jumbo CDs.

I know lots about the float. I have several accounts at out-of-state banks, such as Citibank (South Dakota), N.A.; Chase Manhattan Bank U.S.A. in Delaware; Zions First National Bank in Salt Lake City; and Virginia Beach Federal Savings and Loan (which is not a bank, of course, but it really doesn't matter).

I write checks to myself for thousands of dollars and mail them to an out-of-state bank for deposit. For example, I write myself a \$2,500 check on my Chase Manhattan money market deposit account and mail it for deposit to my Zions money market account. At the same time I make out a check for the same amount on the Utah account and mail it to Delaware. For three days—because of the float—I'm credited with the \$5,000 in both accounts. And I earn top interest on it.

This isn't quite like kiting checks, which is what E.F. Hutton did. They got a slap on the wrist from the federal government; at the time E.F. Hutton's chairman of the board was the brother-in-law of the Vice President of the United States. E.F. Hutton, of course, disappeared in the wake of Black Monday.

"But it's not YOUR money," Linda and Jerry and Mark and Amy tell me.

None of the banks know that.

My favorite activity here in Florida is to go to the Publix Supermarket armed with a dozen credit cards. Not only does their automatic teller machine, Presto, give you directions in a pleasant female voice, but it hooks up to different A.T.M. networks at which my cards are valid: Honor, Cirrus, American Express, The Exchange, Discover, Choice, Metroteller, Star. I take out card after card and get the maximum advances from each.

Once I took out \$2,000 in cash.

It looked like my money.

When I brought it to the bank they took it like it was my money.

They gave me a deposit slip that said it was my money.

It WAS my money.

Okay, maybe today it's not my money, but nothing is permanent. I've never had a permanent, full-time job. Even when I was full-time at the community college for three years, I was always a temporary employee. When I quit, in 1984, I was making \$15,560.94 annually. I have more than that in my CitiBank (South Dakota) High Interest Checking Account right now.

All the adjunct jobs I had at a dozen colleges were temporary. Sometimes they were so temporary I got fired after the first week of class, when some tenured professor decided he didn't feel like coming in three days a week, say, and wanted to teach on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Once I got hired after the term had been in progress for a week or two.

They could not guarantee employment for the next term, especially over the summer, but they would give you a letter saying you were reasonably sure of employment if registration was sufficient—that was another way they keep you from collecting unemployment benefits.

Because a lot of morons who go to college and take remedial English in the fall don't come back in the spring, someone always has to be let go. Now I always volunteer. "Nonreappointment," they call it. I get an official letter in December that says I won't be back next term no matter what.

Then I CAN collect unemployment benefits.

Since 1984, I've spent a total of 108 weeks collecting unemployment benefits. Nice work if you can't get it.

I can live in New York or Washington in the fall and teach at three or four colleges part-time. They always need people for remedial writing or composition now. Most of the people who started with me, back in 1975, are now out of the adjunct business. People like Jerry, who have become systems analysts earn half of what I tell credit card applications I make as a Director Of Training—about \$50,000.

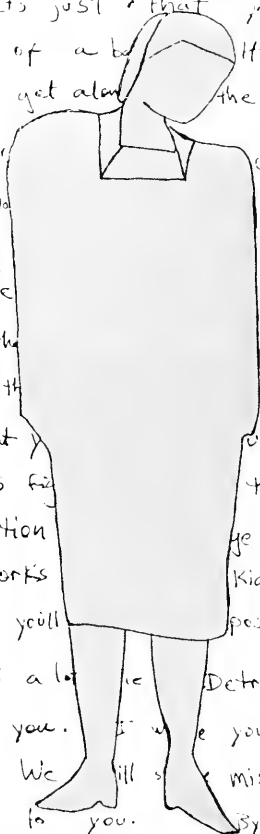
But in New York and Washington the colleges pay well by the hour, almost \$40 now, and if you teach remedial they

usually give you four hours' pay for three hours' work, because nobody wants to teach remedial. The difference between "a" and "an" and "and" is boring.

My department chairmen in New York and Washington lay me off after the fall semester, so in January I head for Florida to escape the winter. In May I head back up North again.

In the north over the last few years, I've lived in a lot of places. You'd be surprised how many Yuppies need to rent out their living room sofa beds. An old college friend on the Upper West Side lives mostly with her boyfriend, but we split the rent, and she doesn't mind if I stay in her bedroom when she's not there. I apartment-sit when people get

We should never have hired you right out of college. See, Mr. Jaymes got the step-up because he'd had a couple of years experience which just count more than an education. Please, try to understand that it's nothing personal. It's just that you sometimes have a bit of a bit of attitude, and you don't seem to get along with the guys. They do appreciate your work, however, and think maybe you're in another department. We've already got your transfer, which will take place in a month. The company can't pay for the transfer, but at least you can be glad that you have any kids or a husband that's a better position. Gosh, I think you'll tell me there's a lot to be made in Detroit. What an adventure for you. If you're younger, I'd go there myself. We'll miss you, honey. Best of luck to you. By the way, there's a



jobs out of town directing a play, or teaching or whatever.

In Washington I've stayed at my cousin's apartment near DuPont Circle. He works for the FDIC and is out of town a lot dealing with failed banks. In Florida, you can always get a cheap furnished place for the winter season. They're overbuilt, and the condo market is glutted.

I don't own a stick of furniture. Since 1984 I've never lived in a room where my suitcases (two) weren't out, ready to go.

So don't tell me anything is permanent.

Don't tell the crazy homeless people who make the Upper West Side an open mental ward. Don't tell my friends who got AIDS. Don't tell the Chairmen of Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, or the President of the New York Stock Exchange.

I've seen Yuppies wearing a T-shirt that says **WHOEVER HAS THE MOST MONEY WHEN HE DIES, WINS.**

I disagree. To me, whoever OWES the most money, wins.

I intend to die a winner.

The losers: Citibank, Sears, First Interstate, First Atlanta, Chemical Bank, Mellon Bank, Bank One and the rest.

Revolving credit is like magic.

When you pay what you owe, you can borrow it again.

Magic.

I always pay every credit card bill. Sometimes I overpay them. That's what I did with my American Express Card, which isn't a credit card, of course, but a charge card you must pay off in full every month. I always paid more than was due, which is how I got a gold American Express card with a \$5,000

line and two Optima Cards with a combined credit line of \$15,000. I showed I had good character.

I've seen my credit reports from TRW, CBI, and TransUnion, and they have no negative information on me, although I am listed as the Director of Training with Information in Motion, Inc. I've never been even thirty days late with a payment. Actually, if you're one day late on a Visa bill, they count it as thirty days with the credit bureaus.

More magic.

Of course, it's not all magic. Not all my money comes from cash advances and credit cards. I do keep teaching, I collect unemployment benefits, and occasionally I sell an article or short story. I didn't do too badly in the great bull market of the '80s by specializing in regional bank stocks. With nationwide interstate banking just around the corner, there are mergers and takeovers like crazy, and banks are paying three and four times the book value of other stocks.

It's their money, right?

Until it's mine.

It did shock me when I caught this cable TV get-rich show featuring a guy who billed himself as The Credit Card Millionaire.

He was doing just what I was doing, only he said he was buying houses for no money down and investing in art and classic cars.

I figured that for a sucker of an English teacher, I wasn't so dumb to stumble on this by myself. I didn't have to pay the \$299 to get the books and tapes for The Credit Card Millionaire system.

The Credit Card Millionaire was a Vietnam veteran and high school dropout.

Unlike him, though, I have contempt



for money. I see it's not real. I have \$60,000 in the bank now—maybe \$70,000 at this very moment—according to the banks, because I'm playing the float. My friends are half-right when they say the money really isn't mine.

The money isn't real at all. But it works. Money is now not really a medium of exchange or a store of value or any of the other things you learn about in economics courses.

Money is just information that you have money.

That's why one of my community college night students came in late one evening and said it was because he'd "lost" a million dollars in the computer.

And that's why I'm Director of Training for Information in Motion, Inc.

I didn't intend to live like this.

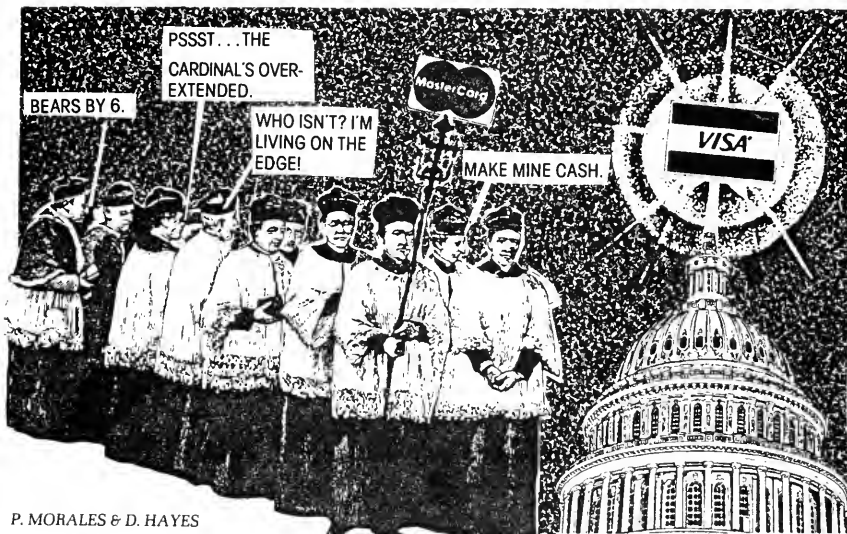
I won't tell you about the miserable minimum wage jobs I had or all the little humiliations I faced; everyone has his or her own story. My story is your story, if you were born in certain years and think a certain way. The history is familiar: 1968 Gene McCarthy & Chicago; 1969 Woodstock; 1970 Cambodia & Kent State & "People's U" & the Tac Squad; 1971 and John Mitchell's sweeping Washington arrests; 1972 Miami as a alternate delegate for McGovern; 1973 Watergate and graduation into a world in which all the rules had changed.

I knew it would be hard to get through the Eighties, so I changed some rules myself. But did it matter? Did I really hurt anyone or anything in the long run? In the 1990s—"our decade," as Rick called it—will anyone care?

Stay tuned.

And keep those minimum payments coming in.

by Gary Richardson



P. MORALES & D. HAYES

CREDIT CARD GULAG

Credit cards and collections in America

It is next to impossible to become as indifferent or brutal as the system in which one is caught...After a day thus spent, the working-man has one complaint which is meaningless to anyone who has never experienced this condition: I thought the day would never end.

- Simone Weil, "Factory Work" Essay, 1936

I work for America's corporate financial thought police. I use an alias; you will never know my name. When you miss payments on your Mastercard or Visa, I send you letters. I am the one who calls you at home or at your work. I am the one who decides to accept arrangements for payment, to refer your account to a collections agency, or to sue you. I can set in motion an investigation which could result in your arrest. My words and actions carry the weight of an immense and faceless bureaucracy. What I do can affect your employment, your ability to purchase a home or an automobile, to borrow money or rent an apartment, for up to ten years.

I have worked in the collections area of a major bank's credit-card division for several years. How I found myself there is a story in itself: suffice to say I am trying, very hard, to get out. As a consumer-survivalist and as a worker, I want to pass on something of what I've learned—part observation, part cautionary tale. In order to survive financially in the America of the 1990's and beyond, you need to understand how the credit card system works. Come with me into the Ministry of Truth for a little tour; but, please leave your ethical outrage at the door.

To finance growth in an increasingly competitive marketplace, America's corporate banks continue to rely on credit cards as the most lucrative aspect of their business portfolios. With the deregulation of banking in the early 1990's, the hunt for new customers will lead to more unsecured lines of credit being offered to consumers, causing them to juggle even more debt.

Surviving in America's mainstream in the last quarter of the Twentieth Century proves the idea that access to credit is more than a privilege. It is a necessity. We live in a consumer society, whose *raison d'être* is the purchase of goods and services. This society is totally dependent on the lobotomizing dazzle of marketing to convince us that we should *want* to go into debt. A culture doesn't produce such sardonic quips as: "You are what you owe"; "When the going gets tough, the tough go shopping"; "He who dies with

the most toys wins"; or, "Can I pay for my Visa with my Mastercard?", without being aware of the symbiosis between reaching for the brass ring of the American Dream, and the price of admission to stay seated on the consumer merry-go-round.

To remain competitive in the credit-card market and make the issuing of plastic profitable banks must limit the losses they suffer through default, fraud and bankruptcy. Fraud is taken seriously, not only from the standpoint of criminality, but because all charges proven as fraudulent can be declared a business loss and deducted as a write-off on the corporate taxes. Little can be done about bankruptcies. The number of personal bankruptcies increases each year. The largest problem for banks is delinquent credit-card payment. The bank's only answer to that problem is the collections department.

In a windowless office occupying the entire floor of a building near a major metropolitan area, separated by beige-colored dividers, some two hundred people sit down to work each morning at eight a.m. (seven a.m. if they are calling to the east coast). With a headset plugged into one ear, hunched forward to stare at a CRT, we begin another day of calling people for payment; within five minutes, the noise from scores of conversations rises to just below a dull roar and remains there for the rest of the day. I must process over one hundred accounts per day. My work is monitored on a daily basis—so many accounts per hour. Of these accounts, I must contact a minimum of three out of every ten people. If I fall below any production level, consistently, I will be fired.

Any collections environment for a bank is an image out of Fritz Lang's *Metropolis*: a dull, focused place where windows might as well be walls, and routine tasks are performed over and over, day upon day until the weeks begin to blur. The collectors are effectively chained by their production requirements to their CRTs for seven-and-a-half hours a day, with time off (who can truly rest in the place where they do a job they dislike?) for lunch or a short break. The only variation in their routine lies in the calls they make—each one different, every conversation a glimpse into a life beset with problems not unlike our own. That contact should, ideally, end by resolving the debt in the banks' favor. The bottom line of the whole deadening experience is: *get the money*.



That resolution could be handled in a businesslike manner. More often than not talking to people in debt becomes a contest of wills. The nature of collections work is a parent-and-child confrontation; the debtor plays the part of the guilty youngster and the collector plays the part of superego. Collections departments actively seek persons who are adept at this kind of manipulation. Psychologically Americans tie their money directly to their self-esteem and collectors know it. Shame is the greatest weapon in the collector's verbal arsenal.

The same people who are gifted at manipulation (usually referred to as "negotiation skills") often use their positions to vent their own self-loathing and anger on the people they contact. They badger, taunt and even humiliate people into paying their debts. They frighten debtors with the specter of litigation and bankruptcy. All this is reinforced through the basic attitudes of other collectors—an "us-versus them" outlook. The job is deadly boring and incredibly stressful. The eye of your manager is never far from your shoulder (his job, too, depends on your performance). As a result of these conditions, the way

people handle money is equated with a person's value.

Having depersonalized debtors, it's a simple thing to begin screaming at them. After a long and sarcastic shouting match, a collector near my cubicle slammed his phone down and then sat back with a huge grin. "Boy do I feel better," he bubbled. "I think I'll sue this bitch." Customers who call to complain, asking for a supervisor, may end up in a second confrontation with the same collector, or may talk to another collector who declares herself or himself to be a supervisor. Managers turn a blind eye to this. Their own time is consumed by projects and paper work and they would rather not have to soothe an irate caller for half an hour. Even if the angry customer manages to reach a supervisor, the collector will not be fired or even reprimanded. Business, after all, is business.

The truth is very few people go into debt with the idea of taking the banks to the cleaners. They all seem to be seeking a better life—which in this culture is achieved through consumer spending. They have simply overspent themselves or suffered a sudden misfortune—loss of

a job, a second income, injury, illness, a divorce or tax problems. Next to "I am doing the best I can," the phrase I have heard the most often is, "I didn't plan for this to happen, you know."

To the collector this is useful information, but it makes no difference. I listened to one woman berating a man for ten minutes demanding to know why he couldn't pay (it was hard not to hear her, as she was shouting into her phone). She slammed her receiver into its cradle after telling the man she would search for any assets he might own and recommend that our bank sue him. The man called back asking to complain to a supervisor. I took the call. We spoke for twenty minutes. I ended by apologizing for the bank and, also, as a human being. The man had AIDS and was about to be hospitalized. I checked the account several months ago and found he had died. His account was marked "Deceased" and placed in the bank's Net Credit Loss file.

In addition to basic attitudes toward money and self-worth, the collections business reinforces class, racial and sexual biases. "Check this out," a collector said to me, waving a hand at the

account on his CRT screen. "Another rude Chicago nigger and he owes us six thousand. Living over his head, probably doing crack." This same "nigger" was a neurosurgeon going through a divorce. There are few black or hispanic collectors in our office. However, even they talk about their own racial groups, if they are debtors, as lazy or trying to get something for nothing. Women who work as collectors are frequently unsympathetic to their debtor sisters.

A collections department is organized to handle a bank's receivables (credit cards from zero days past due through six or more months gone). There are also specialty areas to handle accounts still valid and over their credit limit, bankruptcies, deceased, numerous bad checks, over-seas accounts and those marked for special handling (the accounts of wealthy or famous persons or political figures).

The accounts are held in the bank's computer system. These accounts can be accessed by collectors regardless of their status. Friends? Enemies? Parents? If they have the bank's plastic, they're in the system along with their addresses, telephone numbers, social security numbers and other information.

What follows is the general sequence

Tuesday, 8:57 am



GRAPHIC BY P. MORALES

I've consulted my files... the usual suspects to be rounded up for debtor's prison. Just another day on the job, here in the fluorescent desert.

of collections action as accounts sink towards write-off which occurs when an account becomes seven months past due. The account is added to the Net Credit Loss column at seven months past due. All collection activity is designed to prevent as many accounts as possible from reaching this stage.

From one to two months past due,

you will receive an automatic notice with your bill that you are delinquent—a friendly reminder. At two months past due, you will receive a call, asking if you had overlooked the payment.

At three months, the account is reported delinquent to TRW, CBI and Chilton's—the three major credit bureaus in the United States. At four months past due, you begin receiving messages at your home or office, dunning letters every two weeks and calls every three or four days. The tone here is darker. There is talk of litigation, wage garnishment or levy. Attachment of assets is suggested.

Five months past due is more of the same. Here you can expect to meet the borderline dysfunctionals, the shouters and the growlers whose lives and stomachs are wastelands corroded with bad coffee and bile.

At six months past due, most collectors (in order to keep the account from being written off) will try to reason with you. Suddenly, their attitude may change from Freddy Krugger to your favorite uncle. However, if you make an arrangement with Uncle and break it, Freddy will return. The talk of "lawsuit" and "collection agency" are now quite real. If the account writes off, the bank doesn't forget it, or you. It is assigned to

A Short History of Credit Cards

Credit cards were first offered by banks in 1963. At the time, credit was a radical idea—allowing a customer to charge a purchase, with the merchant reimbursed by the bank. When the idea seemed tested, the American Banker's Association (known simply as "The Association") founded Visa and MasterCard as trademarked names, and developed centralized operations for validation and purchase authorization. ABA member banks could issue credit cards through the association, but at a cost: banks must put up what amounts to a surety bond to cover the cost of carrying the new credit cards in their computers and for other support services. There is also a fee for use of a trademark name, the use of which has to be approved by the ABA. These factors effectively keep many smaller banks out of the credit card game.

In the mid-1970's, New York-based Citibank began to make major offerings of credit cards to customers on a scale that made its competitors laugh. The risks involved in

what amounted to a credit giveaway were large; Citibank appeared to be violating the basic tenet of the banking industry: You do not make loans without guaranteed repayment. Citibank was relying on its marketing division, which (like any major bank today) develops or purchases lists of potential customers from such esoteric sources as the subscription lists of *Esquire*, *Forbes* or *Reader's Digest*. Citibank's competitors expected them to fall on their faces and take losses commensurate with what was seen as an unacceptable risk. The New York bank, however, did not stumble. Its gamble paid off very well. Other banks began trying to catch up, to gain their share of the consumer market, and the great Credit Card Sweepstakes was born.

The idea, once heretical, is now gospel. The greater the number of credit cards you offer, the greater the potential for profit from the interest on that mass of floating debt. One industry source estimates that Citibank (the leader in the bankcard industry) has issued over twelve billion dollars worth of plastic credit. Even if customers have

only spent ten billion of that available credit, at 19.8 annual interest that means a gross profit of nearly two billion dollars a year. As deregulation approaches, the battle within the corporate financial community for larger "market shares" of the credit card industry will increase.

The dark side of this picture is the nature of the loans being offered. They are unsecured. If a customer decides to default, the banks cannot recoup some of their losses through repossession or forced sale as they can with auto or real estate loans. America's banks may have as much as 150 to 200 million dollars in unsecured debt floating on plastic with more planned in the future. A major recession could result in hundreds of thousands of defaulting credit card holders. The Stock Exchange of the late 1920's collapsed due to speculative buying, "on the margin," without adequate capital to pay for what was purchased, and without investor safeguards...very much like buying with a credit card.

by Harold Tuttle

moir



"Frankly, Mrs. Pilkins, it'll be a lot easier for you to pay the \$27,300 telephone bill than it will for us to find the mistake."

the recovery area and the pressure becomes even worse.

The numbers game and the willingness of banks to give credit cards does work in your favor as long as you're current in your payments. But, how do you get a credit card, or more than one, in the first place? The chances are good that by doing nothing the banks will come to you. In your mailbox you may find a letter from Chase Manhattan Bank, or Citibank, or American Express with the words "pre-approved" sprinkled through it. Fill out the application and send it in. If you've lived at

the same address for three years or more, worked at the same job for at least two years or more, and can claim an income of \$20,000.00 or more, you will probably receive a card within three weeks of returning the application.

Solicitations by mail are, along with applications by customers, the prime method to generate new cardholders. As mentioned earlier, how a bank's marketing department determines who to solicit is anything from esoteric to harebrained. Occasionally, banks will perform a test solicitation by sending pre-approved applications to everyone

in a specific zip code who has lived there at least one year. Several banks targeted the baby-boomer or yuppie market for solicitation in the early to mid-1980's. Most of these new customers liked having credit and overextended themselves in droves.

From my own experience, if you can get along with no credit cards, or one with a small credit line, do it. The industry that created the idea of plastic, and will foster its growth into the next century, is dependent upon our greed as much as its own. The siren's song of the American Dream is, for most of us, a greedy tune played on the callopie of a merry-go-round. You can get on, but is it worth the cost to ride?

by Harold Tuttle

Truth or Consequences

A word of caution: using fraudulent information to secure lines of credit is a crime. If you fudge a bit on an application for a Visa with a \$1,200 credit line, even if the bank discovered it, the likelihood you would be prosecuted is akin to the college of cardinals electing a Jewish pope. However, if you use false information on multiple accounts with different banks and are found out, if and when the accounts fall delinquent, you are in serious hot water. Even then, if the total amount you owe on all the accounts is ten thousand dollars or less, the banks' security and fraud divisions may ask you to sign a statement admitting your actions and promising to pay the money back—generally on the same terms as if the accounts had never fallen delinquent.

If you owe \$25,000 or more, the chances of prosecution are good—and not by the banks. As of January 1, 1988, all banks must report any and all fraud charges to the FBI, Secret Service and Treasury Department as a method of keeping banks accountable for the fraud charges they will later declare as business losses. I have handled several cases in the bank where, when informed of high dollar amount fraudulent applications the U.S. Attorney's office in my area had criminal complaints sworn against the individuals involved. Two went to prison; another was placed on probation.

— H. Tuttle

WATCH OUT YOU MIGHT GET WHAT YOU'RE AFTER



GRAPHIC BY MARK BEEBE

OUR AMERICAN ECONOMIC SYSTEM

by Bruce Jacobson

Here's how I spent my formative years.
I studied economics. Directly
from college to an Ivy League M.B.A.
A precocious twenty-two year old
trained to think like the Chairman.
I assessed my strategic position:
grew a mustache and got married.
Figured employers would think I was
"serious."

And they did. And I worked
to fill the vacancy within
sixty-plus hours per week
for five consecutive years.
I gained and I lost.
I gained: weight
to fill the vacancy within
ballooned up to two hundred pounds
until I was almost as fat as
my boss.

He took a liking to me.
My wife complained I wasn't home much
and
to fill the vacancy within
she would run to the
nearest upscale department store
buying things I couldn't afford:
clothes, furniture,
phone calls to her mother.
who had inherited
two point three million dollars
from a chain of movie houses in Phoenix.
Boarding schools in europe, a home in
Hillsborough and a condo in Palm Springs.
My father-in-law lived there
a back-slapping-salesman-type
with a big heart and clogged arteries.
At family dinners, my mother-in-law
held court, and made pronouncements.
Like when she announced that
millionaires were real men.
My father-in-law was silent,
my wife was surprised

at how little salary I made. She said
you don't even make fifty thousand.
With each department store bill
I pitched a fit. Until finally
to fill the vacancy within
I took her credit cards away.
She cried alligator tears
then for a month or so everything seemed
fine.

The stores were letting her spend anyhow.
My boss noticed I seemed a little tense
so he sent my wife and I to
an all-expenses-paid weekend at Caesar's
Las Vegas. He felt good
about solving my problem, so good
that I received a promotion.

I gained and I lost. I became
Vice President at one of
America's major economic think-tanks.
Began traveling all around the world.
I was on a D.C.-Philly turnaround when
my mother-in-law came to town
and took my wife away. But
the new job was quite prestigious.
I made predictions on
the nation's most critical economic issues.
Corporations took them seriously because
they paid thousands of dollars.
I was 26 years old and
had achieved a truly respectable
girth.

Found love and affection at
the candy counter of 7-11.
One day on the plane from Paris
a beautiful French stewardess
took me to her hotel. When I
took off my clothes
I couldn't see over my
wallet. A few days later
I was walking down a street
in a strange city. Something like
Cleveland or Houston or Atlanta
and burst into spontaneous tears.
Later, that day, in a meeting
some asshole said something
and on an impulse of truth like when
anger becomes faith
I walked into my boss's office
and quit.

I gained and I lost.
My appetite grew healthy
for sex. But I lost thousands of
hours of unpaid overtime.
Yesterday I saw a headline
in the business page.
One of my predictions
came true. Income, expenses, decline. Today
I write poems and live with a stripper
the daughter of an economist.
Her happy little nipples create more income
than I ever will.
Last night I woke up in a sweat.
I dreamed that the system went on without me
I dreamed that it mattered.

N A T U R A L O R D E R

NUCLEAR POWER CRYSTAL

Grown in the American Southwest
where the New Age began . . .

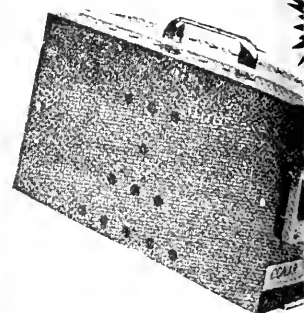
INQUIRE ABOUT OUR NEW LINE OF BULLETPROOF POETS!
JUST IN TIME FOR THE CHILEAN SPRING!!

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POSING A
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Place card and sales slip on
Card Stimulator, rejoice to find
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credit card will never know the
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it's therapeutic. The perfect for
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The MasterRace Card

The MasterRace Card gives me the power to decide what others will think and do. It allows the superiority inherent in my racial/sexual/ideological (pick one) beliefs to fully develop into the superhuman wisdom I'll need when deciding what's best for other people.

Application available from:
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"TAKE ME
I'M READY!"

d Stimulator— Purchase Simulator

in the Credit
the sound of
when tear off
your bills! Your
difference,
knick-knack,
them for your

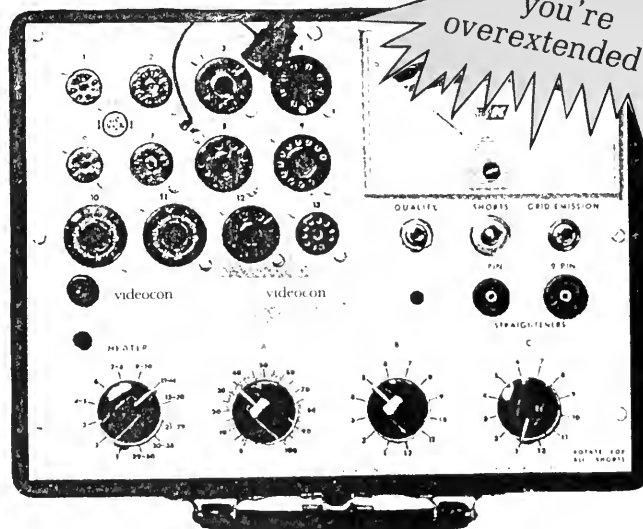
This authentic transaction device is the same as those used under checkout counters in Nordstroms, Saks, and Neiman Marcus.

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and Purchase
month's supply
Just \$15.95
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Order now and get absolutely free "Nordstroms at Noon," a 15-minute cassette recording of shopping background ambience.



Keeps cards in
shape when
you're
overextended...

BIG SHOPPING



ILLUSTRATION BY MARCE HALL

"It hardly matters what I buy, I just get a kick out of buying. It's like that first whiff of cocaine. It's euphoric and I just get higher and higher as I buy."

—Silicon Valley shopper

.....

If conspicuous consumption is a distinguishing trait of industrializing societies, compulsive shopping is a still-evolving mutant strain today. The frenzied consumer purchase of the 1980s proceeds on borrowed funds and in blissful ignorance of need. In Silicon Valley, shopping resembles a mass therapy for the ennui of work-centered lives shorn of spontaneity and saturated with stress, a recoil from work's discontents as powerful as the attraction to work itself.

Compulsive shopping is not peculiar to Silicon Valley although it was here that marketing developed the most widely used modern advertising techniques. It is also here that the divorce of purchase from need unfolds as rapidly as anywhere else. "Shop Till You Drop," the theme of a Silicon Valley service that buses patrons from workplace parking lots to shopping outlets, suggests both the allure and the aimlessness of shopping. In a grotesque parody of George Romero's *Dawn of the Dead*, we wander through malls, purchasing on credit nothing in particular.

Shopping has become a fling from the discipline of daily time-management strategies that rule work, commuting and most other activities. For many, shopping makes the discipline endurable. "Just the thought of shopping makes me feel better," proclaims the modern working mother. The shopping opportunity is not always a cheap or an effective escape, but it is certainly a ready one. America now looks to it (more frequently than to vacation travel) for a new and flirtatious experience beyond the stunted sociality and sameness of its sprawled habitats. But compulsive consumption caters to fleeting urges that no commodity can satisfy for long. In this, shopping is assigned a mission from which it cannot help but return empty-handed.

Taking Charge

The shopper's riotous affairs with impulse and credit have become commonplace. When researchers asked

over 34,000 mall shoppers their primary reason for a visit, only 25 percent responded that they had come to shop for a specific item. Other studies suggest that half or more of all hardware and grocery items are purchased on "impulse." Whim and novelty, not replacement of broken appliances, now guide most houseware purchases.

Like the imagery advertising so deftly attaches to fashion commodities, the wherewithal for the shopping expedition is borrowed. An explosion of consumer credit has heated up the retail economy and placed it on precarious footing. In 1988, with personal savings at all-time lows, nonmortgage debt approaches \$600 billion, up five times from that of 1960. With the force of Pavlovian association, one study observes, people are willing to pay far more for commodities when they see a picture of a credit card near a cash register. Advances in electronic funds transfers, making possible instant credit approval and extension, have taken the governor off the circulation of consumer credit.

The same banks that are overextended in Mexico and South America now court the American consumer. Banks derive upwards of 30 percent of their total profits from their credit card divisions, and at interest rates that our grandparents would consider usurious. Roughly 60 percent of credit card holders use them as informal, openended, and often spontaneous loans. As shoppers sink into debt, they are rewarded with fresh lines of credit. The least examined and perhaps most profound effect of credit card debt is the tightening of ties to one or more jobs (which secures the isolation, stress, and time "crunch" that the new shopping caters to).

As the widening channels of credit expand venues for consumption, the shopping center adds convenience: one-stop shopping for those on time-starved schedules.

Through a delicate web of investments, finance capital has made shopping easy on a scale and in densities that have no parallel in the annals of merchandising. Regional malls, in search of higher shopper densities, add retail outlets exponentially. Silicon Valley malls expand by up to 60 stores at a time. Shopping center proprietors "position" their retail outlet mix in wars of patronage. Mall mergers have occurred.

Through this frenzied retail investment, the consumer marketplace articulates itself in complex, often senseless segmentation. Consumers can choose bargain club shopping of the warehouse outlet, the nostalgic shopping of the flea market, the *haute* shopping of the boutiques, and everything in between—including a hierarchy of special label shops and designer ministores-within-stores. Likewise, shopping diversifies its appeal by privatizing family consumption patterns. In contrast to the practical family shopping of frugal spouses in the 1950's, women and men alike, as well as teenage girls and boys, shop for and by themselves more than ever before.

More than any other public place, the closed space of the privately owned mall is where America congregates. By 1987, over 70 percent of adults were visiting a regional mall weekly, a frequency that was surpassed in Silicon Valley, where shopping density at some malls is nearly 50 percent higher than the national average.

Since so many of the habitats lack a town center, a village square, or a commons, it is hardly surprising that people regularly visit malls. The shopping center is the new commons. With the deployment of malls throughout urban, suburban, and rural landscapes, however, America's municipal squares and public footpaths recede. Transmogrified into a fantasy preserve of commodities where the homeless, oppositional politics, and unconventional behaviors are checked by armed security at the door, the mall has brought civil society a long way toward incorporation within the meta-circuitry of capital.

Disturbing Urgency

Shopping's urgency is transposed into a disturbing priority in the condensed schedules of the 1980s. Each week,

adults average six hours of shopping, far more than the 40 minutes spent playing with children or the hour spent gardening or reading books. Teens spend more time at malls than anywhere else except school and home and are probably envied for it: what some working women want even more than free time during the day is longer shopping hours, a survey suggests.

Before, after, or between work, people rush to transact purchases: some shop via catalog, and phone in their mail orders from their workstations. During work, they chat about or privately plan fresh purchases. ("For Sale" items clog the electronic mail networks at Silicon Valley corporations.) Returning home, credit-bound shoppers, deep in debt but not yet delinquent in their monthly payments, receive unsolicited, preapproved credit cards through the mail. In 1988, the *Wall Street Journal* proclaimed, "Shoppers' behavior has been a major driving force for the economy and has made shopping, arguably, the nation's favorite pastime next to television-watching."

Whatever draws people to shopping centers has less and less to do with fulfilling conventional needs. University studies have begun to isolate the compulsive shopper's symptoms. One study found that one in three shoppers said they regularly experience an irresistible compulsion to buy. In another, four out of ten shoppers admitted that their closets were filled with unopened items. By the mid-1980s, a Silicon Valley credit counseling agency was flooded with calls from "overspenders" fending off bankruptcy. Alarmed and bewildered, the nation's most influential business journal constructed this national profile of the compulsive shopping crowd:

"They don't really need what they are shopping for. Often they don't even know what they're after. Some buy things they never wear or rarely use; many buy and then return what they bought, then buy again and return that."

The report lists six very private motivations for shopping. Most, including "alleviating loneliness," "dispelling boredom," "shopping as an escape," "fantasy fulfillment," and "relieving depression," are borrowed wholesale from the vocabulary of psychotherapy.

Unavoidably, the experts began to address the compulsive shopper. Do we shop because we need, or do we now simply need to shop? According to a marketing professor whose research identified the most avid shoppers as the single, the widowed, and the divorced, "Shopping appears to be a substitute for a relationship." Silicon Valley credit counselors suggest that shopping has become a path to instant gratification made irresistible by widespread despair and loneliness. Shopping, according to a psychologist and president of a New York consulting firm, "is a lot more than simply providing for necessary things. It is obviously fulfilling many needs—a lot of people don't like to confess that."

A Berkeley "wellness" newsletter, in an article entitled "Mall Mania," advises "the compulsive shopper" to lock up credit cards, maintain a purchase "diary," and "analyze the motives of compulsive shopping." The doses of therapy prescribed escalate: "If unhappiness is the cause [of compulsive shopping]...a support group may help." But "if self-help doesn't work, the shopper...should consider psychotherapy."

The bill has come in for the flat new suburban culture of Silicon Valley in the 1980s—the homogeneous isolation of

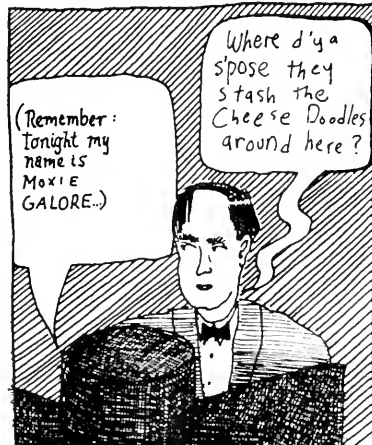
ON THE TOWN WITH SANDY AND NIPPER



A Photographer's Flash



A Pensive Glance



A Point of View

the ranch style subdivision, the condominium theme park, and the landscaped apartment complex. Hodly pursued for their safety or reclusion, these post-urban habitats until recently secured a slight reduction in street crime compared to that of city-block neighborhoods. But drug dependencies, divorces, and time spent alone all rise alarmingly in Silicon Valley, suggesting a lonely and unwholesome collective existence. This, along with our unflinching dedication to stressful work, has charged shopping with a special excitement and erotic purpose in daily life, a purpose that has swerved sharply onto the soft shoulder of values and lifestyles-based advertising.

The New Channels

Shopping has become an impulsive journey into a new *mondo bizarro* of marketing fantasy that plays upon an inner realm of modern desires. A marketing paradigm—"psychographics"—has emerged to identify and help cultivate new consumer vulnerabilities. Its mission: to resupply the marketing intellect with modern channels.

In the 1980s, Silicon Valley's own Stanford Research Institute (SRI) International pioneered the most prominent and probably widely used psychographics system, the Values and Lifestyles program (VALS). Silicon Valley was a likely breeding ground for psychographics theory. Without stable families or workplaces, consumption "patterns" for its many social groups lacked demographic consistency, became less reliable and hence—for ad-

vertising campaigns—less predictable. This, and the chaos of overdevelopment that defied residential zoning coherence, upset marketing's traditional demographic tools, including assumptions about the cohesiveness of social groups.

VALS attempts to characterize and order social values, beliefs, fantasies and dreams to better attach these to commodities through the medium of advertising. This, however, requires coming to terms with the identity crises that contemporary culture poses for consumers. VALS updates marketing's abiding focus, a kind of sociology of personal problems, by depicting the fragile and complex sensibilities of the 1980s. To marketing, the new alienation appears as an array of daily emotional problems caused by the collapse of widely shared values and an accompanying instability in every realm of life.

SRI International was on intimate terms with the new alienation. A modern, multipurpose consultant to the Pentagon, the medical industry, and industrial management as well as advertising agencies, SRI published some of the first monographs on post-modern lifestyles. These included remarkably candid accounts of the new alienation, such as the following, published in 1979: "alienation of the [U.S.] office worker is expected to be a growing problem. [The office of the future] may quite possibly become a more impersonal place in which to work...this suggests a potentially far more lonely existence for the individual office worker."

The SRI reports and surveys chronicled the fantasies and fears as well as

"higher needs" stirred and left unfulfilled by society. A profound new consumer wantonness was in the offing. VALS articulated a paradigmatic shift within the marketing community in order to better explore the possibilities.

In the 1983 paperback introduction to VALS, SRI's Arnold Mitchell renders a composite snapshot of the compartments of modern American culture. *The Nine American Lifestyles* traverses the spectrum of the fragmented American character: Survivors, Sustainers, Belongers, Emulators, Achievers, Experientials, I-Am-Me's, as well as the Socially Conscious. Atop a hierarchical topology is the totally integrated individual who overcomes fragmentation by balancing "inner-directed" and "outer-directed" traits and needs. (The fastest growing inner-directed group constituted 20 percent of the national population in 1980 and a much higher proportion in Silicon Valley and the San Francisco Area.) Equating "integration" with "psychological maturity," Mitchell and VALS set forth a marketing sociology that treats consumers as an amalgam of lifestyle constructs. SRI's VALS program and psychographics have evolved into a strategy to confront consumers with emotional and "experiential" material that is longed for but lacking in modern life.

For marketing, the VALS topology has been both practical and insightful. Since disintegration is the chief sociological fact of life in places such as Silicon Valley, it follows that commodities should adopt the iconography of what is missing in consumers' lives,



offering a path (consumption) to balanced psychological life. VALS-based psychographics also implicitly rejects a popular sociological fraud of the era: the much maligned "materialism" of the cynical upscale professionals. Strictly speaking, it is not *materialism* that drives people to shop beyond their means and needs. Shoppers aren't pausing to rationally select useful goods, nor are they "price-shopping." On the contrary, they pursue the fantastic symbols offered by commodities, and by consumption itself. From the technical sophistication of a "dress watch," to the durability of ballistics-grade travel luggage, to the purity of the organically grown tomato, people are shopping for qualities that make them feel secure in an unstable world.

SRI was among the most persistent of marketing researchers in evoking the stuff of psychotherapy: experience and emotion. By 1985, then-SRI researcher James Ogilvy announced, "Advertisers are recognizing that to consumers, emotions are stronger than ideas;" and that "in the information economy, one's higher needs are satisfied through experiences." Betraying a preference for black-box behaviorism, Ogilvy articulated a chilling construct: "The line between a product and its image is blurring. People look at products as if they were mood-altering substances." In other words, marketing could take advantage of and encourage a growing separation between product and primitively derived needs in favor of a higher consumerism defined as: "anything you can do to your mind with a product or service." "Psychographics," as one observer succinctly put it, "help businesses position their products in the minds of consumers."

"Positioning" commonly involves explicit attempts to mollify social loneliness. New modalities of ad copy speak to outsiders, urging them to look into the warmth and intimate society of casual and carnal acquaintance. "Who are we?" asks Esprit, the West Coast fashion house, in a brochure pushing designer denim for teenagers. "It doesn't matter where you're from, what kind of job you have, or what you believe in. There is a common bond. You recognize it [your bond, their denim] when you see it." Among the outwardly bonded, however, there is plenty of room for inner, individual statement. Esprit features "three different washes and two kinds of fabric, yielding a wide variety" of denim that includes six separate bleach washes made according to discrete "industrial processes." The Esprit brochure itself offers a distinct "feel" with a corrugated soft brown cover. A competing design

house features a thoroughly jean-clad teenage couple sitting in a tire on a street, gazing unassuredly in different directions. The spare, "integrating" jingle: "Jordache Basics...because the world—isn't." Also frequently invoked are the lifestyle icons and dramas that evoke whatever is missing from the consumer's real life but imagined desirable by marketing research: open roads for high-performance cars, loving children who don't drop out, contented and cared-for elderly citizens.

From the high ground of psychographic perspective, less and less restrained by sexual mores, the marketing mind sees in contemporary American culture a wide spectrum of longings and values that advertising might reaffirm: from family love and domestic stability to fat-free gluttony and casual sex. Thus, a semblance of sociological *verite*—a silhouette of the new alienation—often emanates from ad copy. A journalist discerns facets of that alienation in "the new Madison Avenue sexuality":

"Its central characteristics are its introspection and separation from social context. Fathers, sons, and businessmen have not disappeared from contemporary advertising imagery, but they have been supplemented by someone else: the single male figure, existing in a sexually charged social void with perfect, Nauticus-chiseled contours. He exists alone,

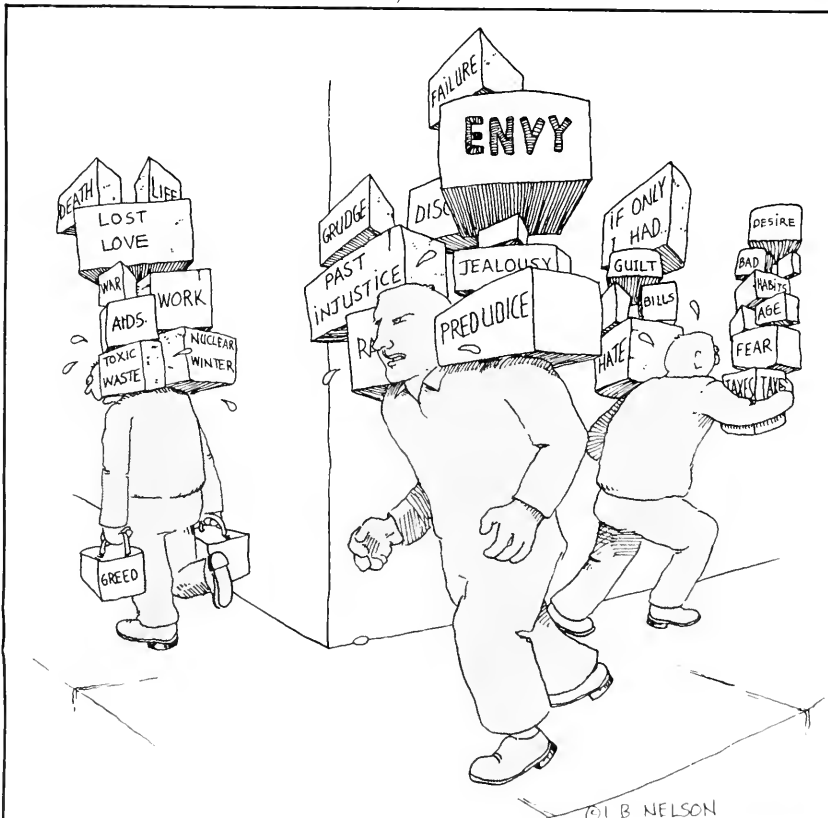
his body a work of obvious labor in the gym, his lifestyle apparently affluent, but beyond that, unspecified." (Andrew Sullivan, "Advertising Goes Soft-Core: Today's Marketing Campaigns Peddle Titillation with a Twist," reprinted from *New Republic* in *This World*, a Sunday supplement of the *San Francisco Examiner*, 3 April 1988.)

Utterly banal as popular culture, shopping elicits private motivations that run deep. If the fulfillment of "higher needs," the prized "integration," is impossible to achieve in daily life, then at least the emotional and experiential semblance could be borrowed from advertising's prefabricated self-imagery. All that is required are new and frequent purchases.

VALS marks a more explicit and certainly more forthright incorporation of therapeutic technique into mass advertising. The new advertising helps propel shopping into a dominant and, for some, dominating, pastime; a cross-over into a world of fantasy that is more voraciously consumed than the commodities themselves. The human relief spelled by shopping is profound but brief.



—Dennis Hayes



MEMO

TO: Unionized Staff
FROM: Bored of Trustees

We the benevolent and concerned group that actually runs this place are making a few changes for the better here at SFAI. You whom we have chosen to work in the glamorous jobs of the Art Institute had better shape up or ship out. It's about time you realized life doesn't take place in some lovely, skylit painter's studio. Wake up and smell the new carpet! This is 1988.

First of all we are alarmed by the eclectic manner of dress some of you aspire to. If you don't receive the following catalogs we suggest you start:

MALE/FEMALE EMPLOYEES

L.L. Bean

FEMALE EMPLOYEES

Talbots

Carroll Reed

If you aren't familiar with any of these we have put a few copies on reserve in the library. The second issue is financial. Apparently some of you are complaining about the cost of housing in relation to your rather generous salaries. You should be thankful that you have a place to live. There are homeless people who would be ecstatic to have a roach-infested roof over their heads. If you were truly interested in wise money management, though, you might consider investing in an economical army cot and sleeping in SFAI's spacious maintenance area. You could shower in the restrooms. If you need a place for some of your possessions "San Francisco Loc-N-Stor" should be able to accommodate you.

For those of you who own cars why not live in them? We realize it may be a bit cramped at first, but as soon as we finish our architectural space study we will start construction on our fabulous, multi-level, underground employee parking garage. You can live there and still utilize the beautifully remodeled restrooms for your personal grooming needs.

Following these suggestions should free up a good deal of disposable income. More importantly, it should cut down on the amount of time off you people have. If you live here you can never really take a day off so why bother pretending? We love you, we care about you. Why do you keep trying to fight us? You'll be happy working a 40 hour week and we'll be happy too.

Lastly, and most importantly, there is a great deal of work to do at SFAI. We're not running a home for struggling artists. Art is a business like any other. (Just ask Keith Haring.) We recently completed a study and SFAI ranked last in almost all categories. We are behind in painting—125 less BPM (Brush Strokes per Minute) than the next lowest school. We had less KFH (Kiln Firing Hours). We produced 10,000 less feet of completed film and our Performance/Video department's performances were 30% less avant-garde than our competitors. We need to amend these figures and we need the help of a docile, acquiescent staff to do it. Won't you be that staff?

We think you will soon see the error of your ways. Let's be realistic. If you really cared about the quality of your lives you would have been born to wealthier parents or gone to business school or gotten into financial planning or accounting. Sure those things are dull and uncreative, but so are we and that's the way we like things. The bottom line is we have money and power and we're going to exercise that power whether it makes sense or not.

If you want to get in touch with any of us please call our secretaries. We'll all be out of the country at some point, but we may have a few spare minutes.

In the meantime...Get to work, scum!

Most of the counterfeit memos reprinted in *PW* are written in isolation, in a sea of anonymity. In contrast, the above memo (reprinted here in slightly revised form), emerged out of an open dispute between the new administration at the San Francisco Art Institute and the unionized workers over their contract, which expired in September (they're affiliated with Office and Professional Employees Local 2). The memo was distributed throughout the SFAI along with "real" memos and letters from the SFAI president, leaflets from the union local and the Art Institute union negotiating committee, and a flyer by students that supported the workers. Although the conflict did not reach the point of a strike, tensions have been high throughout the fall of '88: recently SFAI has seen workers doing informational pickets on their lunch hour, students lambasting the President at an open meeting on the issue, a staff "sick-out," as well as plenty of bathroom graffiti, xeroxed graphics and a couple of wandering troubadours singing about the conflict in the school's courtyard. But of the mountain of paper produced in the dispute, this memo gives us the clearest insight into what happened.

Unlike the typical union battles against wage cuts, the SFAI workers have fought mainly to *keep their free time*. For over a decade, they have worked a 35 hour week (or less), with 2 paid weeks off at Christmas, and ten paid days off throughout the summer, in addition to personal vacation time. While this surely originated at the school's convenience, according to the rhythms of the semester system, the SFAI workers (many of them working artists, alumni and students) have developed their own vested interests in their free time. When the administration moved to take away this "extra" time off on the grounds of general "productivity" the workers refused.

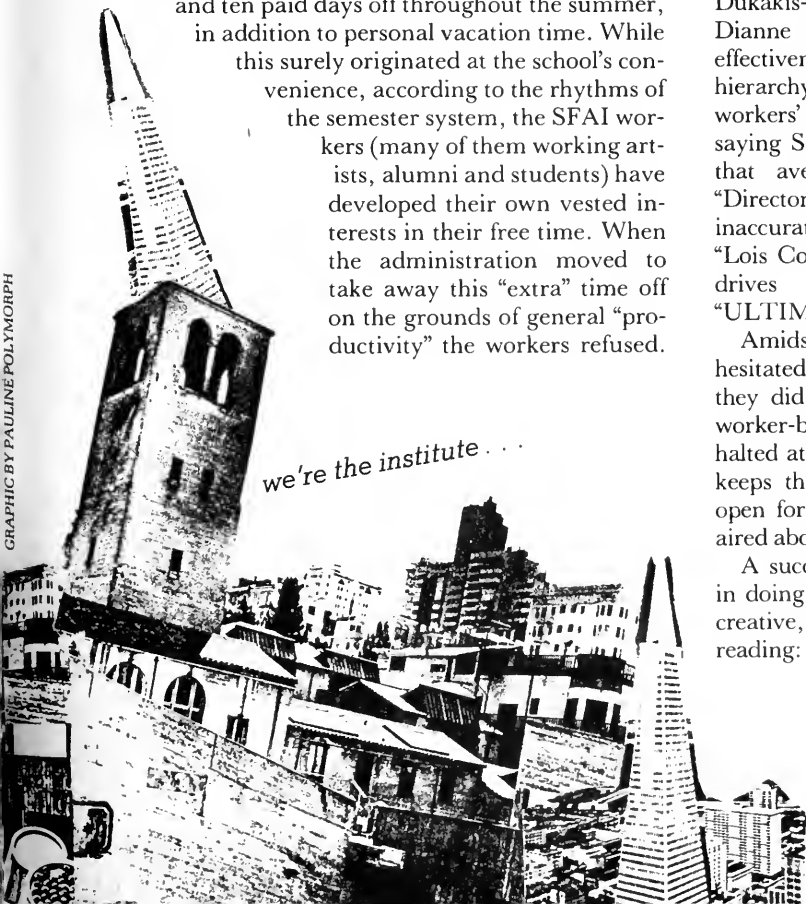
Here are some people who feel they have something better to do than work! Surprisingly, many students, who pay very expensive tuition fees, despise the administration and have supported the staff.

The students' interest in the staff's fight reveals the larger issue of what kind of school SFAI is becoming. The administration's corporatizing thrust is in obnoxious contrast to the school's old affiliation with the ethereal realm of avant-garde art-making. Art is supposed to be detached from the crass materialism of nearby office and tourist industries. Power politics here in art-land usually is cloaked in the groovy fog of "freedom of expression" (not to deny that the free space is real). The basic problem appears where this fog is touched by the sun of the free market, at which point "free expression" evaporates in a jiffy. While fine arts have traditionally been a status symbol for the old rich, more recently they have been used like Rollex watches, as objects with beauty and permanence that might get a good price if their yup owners want to pawn them in the uncertain future. The nouveau-Yup realists at SFAI want to rein in the avant-garde craziness; they want to placate the SFAI's rich backers; they want to freshen-up the smelly, paint-smeared student body (get um ready for the real world) and most of all they want the staff to be professional cogs, not idiosyncratic individuals. The Yup takeover has been headed by a Dukakis-clone President and a crew of (ex-S.F. mayor) Dianne Feinsteins-in-training. Their God is cost-effectiveness. They argue for a more byzantine wage hierarchy and less time off, comparing the SFAI workers' conditions to workers in similar art schools, saying SFAI workers should bring themselves down to that average. No wonder that the much reviled "Director of Human Resources" who compiled an inaccurate survey of other schools has been nicknamed "Lois Common Denominator!" (She's asking for it: she drives a car with a license plate spelling "ULTIMATE".)

Amidst today's political doldrums the SFAI workers hesitated to strike or make offensive demands. But they did fight off the time bandits' attempt to impose worker-bee status on the staff. The administration too halted at the prospect of a strike. A deal was struck that keeps the status quo on time off but leaves the door open for future haggling. But the basic questions were aired about what the school is all about.

A succinct expression of the conflict the workers face in doing boring, repetitive labor daily so others can be creative, was made by one worker who wore a button reading: "I'm a Slave to Art."

by Jeff Goldthorpe



BORN AGAIN



GRAPHIC BY IRS

Outwardly Xavier Zanzibar was just another hard-working, fast-rising, well-groomed, decent, docile executive assistant to a junior VP. But inwardly our man XZ was a boiling teapot of erotic dreams. Each day when the rest of the office went out for coffee, XZ put up his feet and let his imagination run amok. Sometimes a single woman would come walking through the door, clad in some clinging gown of translucent white. Intimations of her body would come rippling to view amid the rippling of her garments as she waded through the ambience of her own sexuality toward the Pacific Ocean of his lust. Sometimes dozens of women at a time would burst through the door and pour across the carpet to cover him with breasts and thighs, tongues and lips, fingers and cracks, bumps and mounds.

Of late, however, mere quantity of flesh had begun to pall for XZ. Mere quality had begun to bore him too. His imagination had launched a restless search for variation. He had teased out all the erotic implications to be found in garter snaps, shoe laces, and toes. This morning, in his imagination, he had dared to cross species lines — a giraffe, with her graceful, endless neck... the premise evolved to such a point that his brain went limp. Just then the bong of the big clock woke Xavier Zanzibar out of his reveries. Coffeebreak was over. He flipped the switch on his intercom. "Miss Droople?"





her tongue slide across the painted flesh that briefly became her smile again, and took a step forward.

"Don't you know me?"

"Should I?"

She turned around and slipped the bolt to lock the door. "Tell your secretary to hold your calls."

With shaking fingers he punched the intercom button. "Miss Droople," he croaked, sweating now. "Hold my calls."

The woman moved slowly across the carpet, mellifluous. Her fingers ran over her body like snakes looking for buttons and zippers.

"Why don't you come over here and do that," XZ managed to choke out.

"Why don't you come over here and say that," she replied, arching her back.

Xavier couldn't believe (or under-

stand) his luck. He pushed his chair back and stood up, feeling woozy. Her fingers writhed like eels, drawing up her skirt, gradually exposing two tanned pillars of thigh. For one fleeting moment, XZ did wonder about the wisdom of letting all this proceed without further questions. He was, after all, supposed to be working on the Perkins Account. But by then he was already touching one of her breasts. She wiggled against his palm. He touched her belly.

"Lower down," she whispered.

He slipped to his knees as she drew her skirt up to her waist.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

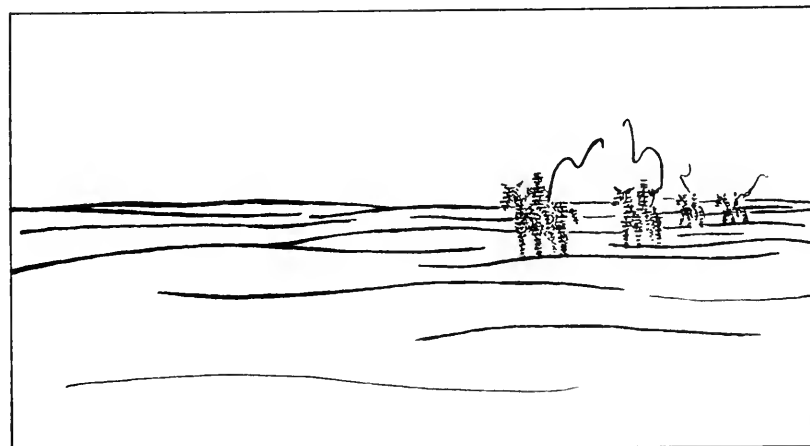
"Don't stop," she crooned, sinking to the floor.

Her thighs beat around his ears, and her voice sounded like distant sea gulls. His tongue, like a pink reptilian creature with a will of its own, crawled into the succulence, dragging his head along. At first XZ was satisfied to feel his face lapping up against that slick flesh, but after a moment he discovered that those lips were sufficiently elastic to accommodate his entire head if he pressed. This made breathing a bit difficult, but under the circumstances XZ was happy to forego the oxygen. Besides, the source of the sweetness always seemed to be a little further in, always a little further in. His tongue, drawn to that source, drove on into the darkness, dragging XZ along. Now his shoulders too had cleared the slippery gate, but XZ was barely aware of this. He propelled himself forward, though he scarcely knew that he was doing it, by pushing off against the carpet, until at last, lost in a torrent of sensation, XZ had crawled physically and entirely inside the stranger.

At last, totally exhausted, he lay still inside the pulsating darkness. When at last he did open his eyes, he expected to find flesh pressed against his eyeballs.



GRAPHIC BY JRS



"Yes sir?" said the luscious 17 year old that he liked to imagine was on the other end of that line.

"Any messages for me?"

"Yes, sir. Mrs. Zanzibar is here to see you."

Xavier frowned. "Mrs. Zanzibar?"

There *was* no Mrs. Zanzibar—he wasn't married. Was this some forgotten girlfriend, after him with a paternity suit? Impossible: XZ had never had a girlfriend. "Send her in," he said and took his feet off the desk.

She walked in quietly, leaning against the door to close it. She might have been in her early twenties, and though she looked damnably familiar he could not quite place the face. She was wearing a floor length fur coat. With a casual flick of her fingers, she undid the first button, a trace of a smile flickering on her lips.

XZ gulped and tried to speak.

She tossed her head. Her copper-toned hair swirled and settled on her shoulders again: just like in the shampoo commercial. Without moving away from the door she undid the second and third buttons of her coat, finally letting the bulky fur slide off her shoulders and drop to the floor. She was dressed in a semi-transparent, clinging white gown.

"What the hell—?" XZ started out of his chair. "Who the hell—?" he spluttered.

She rounded her lips into an O, let

Instead, to his surprise, he was lying on his side, looking out over a vast, undulating pink plain. The ground was soft, almost rubbery to his touch.

Almost at once he noticed a clump of specks moving toward him from the horizon: soldiers on horseback, cracking nasty-looking whips. Long, limp scabbards swung at their waists.

XZ scrambled to his feet. He was still wearing his three-piece pin-striped suit, which put him in glaring contrast to his background. He looked for a place to hide but there was not a rock or a bush in sight. In any case it was too late. The soldiers reined up around him, yammering some foreign gibberish.

"What in God's name do you devils want?" XZ shouted.

"Money," one of them replied in perfect English.

"Ha! XZ nodded triumphantly. They were human after all. "Well, let me tell you something, you sons of bitches.

I never carry cash." He flipped out his string of credit cards. It was a foot and a half long, the biggest in the whole office by four inches.

A gasp went up among the creatures. Barking and yelping, they swooped him up, trussed him in a rope, and poured across the quivering pink plain at a gallop, whooping like sophomores and firing festive farts. Presently the flat terrain gave way to a block-like environment in pleasant decorator colors. XZ found himself swept through a pair of ornate gates, into a low-slung ranch-style abode of palatial size. Indoors, the grandeur of the furnishings added to the sensation of immensity. Laquered French and Oriental antique end tables were covered with rare treasures from Neiman-Marcus. The walls were papered with authentic ten and twenty dollar bills. The south side of the house was a single big picture window looking out over a magnificent vista of Spanish

chinchillas on a hillside that plunged breath-stoppingly down to a speckled valley, across which one could see a picturesque settlement of peasants clinging to a mountainside.

Lolling in front of this view was the ugliest creature upon whom XZ had ever laid eyes.

"Who—who are you?" he stammered in amazement, but the creature ignored him.

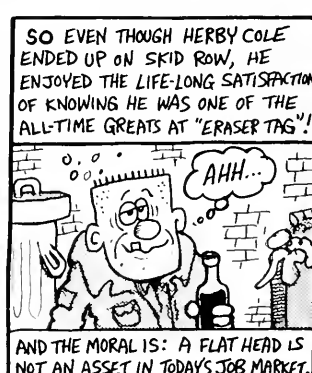
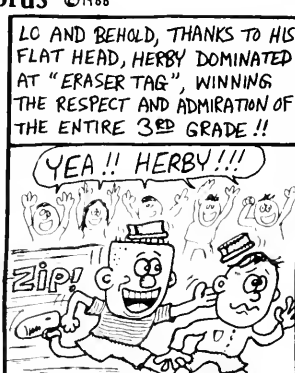
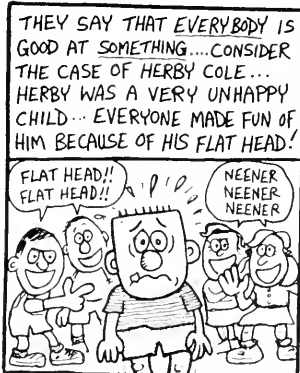
"Set him down," the monster rumbled, lighting his cigar with a hundred dollar bill. He gazed at XZ for a moment. Then: "Let's see the cards," he ordered finally, blowing a series of fat cumulus smoke rings.

Several of his cringing subordinates leapt to obey and got into a snarling tangle.

"Stop that, you idiots," the Boss roared. The dogfight stopped dead. "You want to rip up the card? Fido! Bring me that wallet. Spot, you untie the organism that was stuck to the

TWISTED IMAGE

by Ace Backwards ©1988



wallet. We might have a job for him later on."

XZ deeply resented being described as the organism stuck to his wallet; and he was unpleasantly curious about the "job" he might be given later. Meanwhile, the Boss was leafing through the cards. "Bank-Empire Card, Andalusian Express, Carte Noir, Fifteen Pigs Courtesy Card," he murmured, and then the glitter in his eyes intensified. "Ah...here it is...Super Charge." His fat face cracked into a smile of greed and pleasure. "Lily!" he called out, then pointed a huge finger stained with tobacco juice at the yelping soldiers. "Get out, all of you."

"Lily!" XZ exclaimed. That name...

And then she came into the room, dressed in mesh-screen black stockings and garter belt under a short, semi-transparent white dress. She looked younger now, practically a girl, but the copper-toned hair still cascaded over her unmistakable shoulders, and that face...that damnably familiar face...The girl stepped forward, paying no attention to XZ. The Boss thrust the card into her small hand.

"Cash or charge, sir?" she inquired sweetly.

"CHARGE!" bellowed the monstrosity, thrusting his bottom high up into the air, revealing not the usual puckered orifice but a slot-like affair about two and a half inches long.

"CHARGE!" he shouted again, and the girl obediently galloped forward, the credit card held out in front of her like a short flat sword, until she plunged it into the atypical opening presented to her.

The howling and heaving which then ensued made the windows tremble. The Boss seemed to shrink above and below till he consisted only of one enormous blubberous mass which sprang forward and back, engulfing with each thrust not

just the charge card but the whole hand and part of the arm which fed in the piece of plastic.

The girl wore an expression of profound boredom. Her eyes had gone virtually grey. Her skin was stretched tightly across her cheekbones while bulges on both sides of her jaws showed how tightly clenched her mouth was. Her lips were squeezed together in a taut, tight line.

"SUPER CHARGE! SUPER CHARGE!" the corpulent creature kept shouting until his words blurred and dissolved into a general moaning. Suddenly he began to quiver and emit explosive grunts. Small coins embossed with the profiles of presidents and other notables cascaded from his mouth while greenbacks—one, five, and ten dollar bills—spewed from his other end. "Yowee! Zap! Super Charge! Wow!" he shouted and collapsed into a gelid heap.

Until this moment XZ had been transfixed, but now horror and repulsion erupted in him. He leapt for the door but the girl blocked his way.

"Not through there," she said sharply. "The running dogs of imperialism will tear you to pieces."

"You mean—?"

"That's right." She put a warm hand on his arm. "There is only one way out of here."

"You mean—?" XZ's gaze dropped to her crotch.

"No," she protested. "Not that way—him." She glanced toward the Boss, piled atop his mounds of cushion, splay-legged in burbling snores of sleep. His organ dangled to the floor, monstrous even in repose.

"Through...him?" XZ felt himself shrinking like a snowball on a hot day.

"Yes." She pressed the credit card into his hand. "Now...while he's still asleep."

Oh, hurry!"

The running dogs were rattling the door.

"I can't!"

"You must!" She gave him a push.

The Boss was stirring now; the commotion was beginning to wake him up. "Quick!" she screamed again. "It's your only chance!" She grabbed his hand impatiently and dragged him to the couch, forcing the card toward the mass of the Boss's behind. No sooner had the card touched the slot in that mass, then, like a garbage disposal, the cavity began to suck in our man Xavier Zanzibar.

"But what about you?"

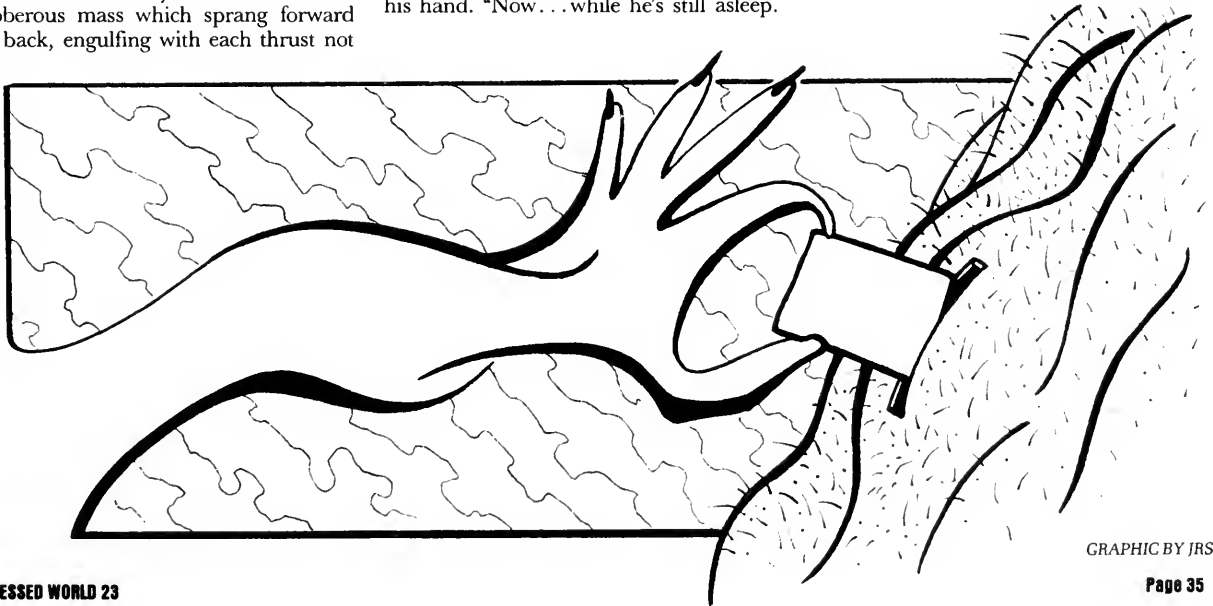
"Goodbye," she called out tearfully. The running dogs had gotten through the door and were already swarming over her.

"I'm taking you with me!" He flung his hand out, but too late. She was pulled to the floor while XZ, two inches ahead of the running dogs of imperialism, disappeared into the belly of the monster.

Disappeared from one scene, that is, but reappeared in a more familiar location—his own office: reappeared with a popping sound like a cork coming out of a bottle. The room was empty and XZ had the strange feeling that no more than a second or two had passed since he had told Miss Droopie to send in the mysterious "Mrs" Zanzibar. In fact the door was opening and then...in she walked. And XZ caught his breath, remembering now that of course there was a Mrs. Zanzibar.

"Mother," he exclaimed, rising partially out of his seat. "What're you doing here?"

by Tamim Ansary



GRAPHIC BY JRS



TAMERLANE

by Barbara Schaffer

Tamerlane rioting west
conduit of fear
& underfed bears.

Beyond the electric shed
a topic was suggested
introduced, dismantled,
sold for parts:

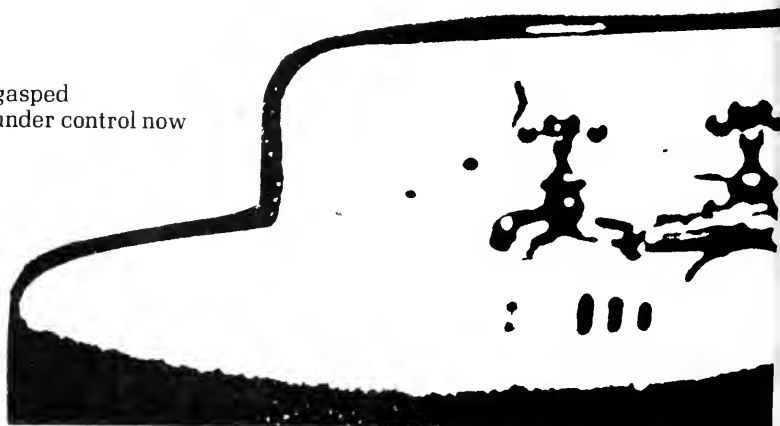
Loneliness, the exile in the
wilderness, the exemplary wilderness of
million-dollar homes & no homes
& no children or drugged children
the soft-coal fog of gin lane
the economy of the Colosseum:

Tens of thousands of exotic beasts
captured, cared for, destroyed for
games and gods 'R Us.

MR. TRUMP

by Ann-Marie Hendrickson

Mr. Trump woke up in the morning and smashed the claws
off his hands with the hammer he
always kept next to his bed for this purpose
smashed his long teeth shaved his face pounded
the wall and howled
careful attention to detail
is all that separates us from the animals he snarled
crunching his broken teeth into his bloody stumps
never forget who your true friends are he
whined into the mirror and flushed magenta trying to
focus his eyes on his own reflection that
is the secret of my success whining and pacing
around the bathroom
what a struggle it is to retain
your humanity in this business he muttered lashing
blindly at the shower curtain
pacing and
pacing
around the bathroom
with each circuit his knee
banged into the bathtub he
shrieked and pounded the wall he held
his breath until he felt very faint and staggered gasped
gulping in the steaming air wheezing yes it's all under control now



GRAPHIC BY PAULINE POLYMORPH



St. Gabriel Park on First Avenue and Thirty-sixth Street was old and more run-down than Dan remembered. The black paint on the wrought-iron fence was chipped and peeling, and the windows of the brick parkhouse were boarded up and covered with colorful, three-foot-high graffiti.

Scanning the playground in front of him, he put up his collar and breathed steamy breath on his cold cupped hands. The tall bare sycamores lining the asphalt paths stood beautifully against the sunny Manhattan skyline, against the Empire State building some six blocks away.

Behind the big swings two young mothers eased their bundled-up three-year-olds down the slide. He walked to the other side of the parkhouse. Near the fenced-in sandbox several homeless men and women sat on the sunlit benches—talking and rubbing their gloved hands. He inspected their tanned, leathery faces; his mother was not among them, and he headed for the asphalt softball field.

There could be no tricking her he told himself, ducking through a gash in the chain-link fence and stepping into left-centerfield. Or physically forcing her to come with him, as Kevin and Sean had stupidly tried the week before Christmas. They'd dragged her to the curb and were about to get her into Kevin's car when her flailing and shouting brought the parkey and enough sympathetic passers-by to help her escape. Sean chased after her, slung her over his shoulder and carried her, kicking and screaming, back to the car. But Kevin said the "interfering bastards" had stuck around and again kept them from getting her in. And after Sean bloodied the parkey's nose they'd sped away without her. No, Dan thought, heading toward the backstop, there'd be no more of that caveman approach. He wasn't sure what he could offer her but

whatever it was, he'd respect her decision. Let her make up her own mind.

Behind the backstop a group of teenagers—a Spanish kid, three white girls, two black guys in flaring blue dorags—inspected him. As he neared they hid behind their backs the joint and brown-bagged quart of beer they'd been passing. Loud rap music pounded from their monstrous radio. He figured they were cutting class from a nearby high school, and as he passed he gave them the fearless yet unchallenging look he knew would let them return to getting high, and to dancing in that robotlike style Sean had described.

He walked out the side exit, then crossed the narrow street that cut the park in two. On the corner of Second Avenue an abandoned red Duster sat on the sidewalk, ransacked and tireless.

Except for a few dirty chunks of snow, the shuffleboard and handball courts were empty. At the far end of the basketball court a heavily dressed old woman sat on the bench reading; he headed towards her.

The old woman didn't look up, but something about her shabby brown overcoat seemed familiar.

"Ma?"

From beneath a worn green balaclava with a white pompom, his mother looked up. Her face was wrinkled and red—her eyes slightly bloodshot, and glassy from the cold. She stared at him with mild shock, then smiled faintly.

"I can't believe you're doing this, Ma."

Her face hardened.

She glanced down at his father's pants, then at Sean's bomber jacket and her ruddy eyelids narrowed.

"If you're here, Danny —" she hissed between clenched teeth, "to try 'n drag me home, you better

turn around — 'fore I call a cop."

He stepped back and threw up his hands. "No. No, I just came to say hello." He watched her face soften a bit, then asked if he could sit down. She bit her lower lip and looked at him suspiciously. She picked up the book she'd laid face down on her lap, and resumed reading. *The Color Purple*, the book was, by Alice Walker. He'd not read it, but he knew what it was about. It was a far cry from the platonic romance novels she'd read in bed when he was young, after she washed and dried the dishes, and wiped off the kitchen table, and put the younger kids to bed.

He shoed a pigeon from the empty side of the bench, and with his hand inspected it before he sat down. Sitting, the cold rushed through his father's thin pants. He forced himself to ignore it.

"I would've come sooner, Ma, but I was having a rough time getting used to the city."

Beside the trash can by the fence, two pigeons pecked at chicken scraps from a box of Kentucky Fried Chicken.

He laughed, remembering his first two days back, then looked at her. "I might not have made it if I'd tried coming yesterday."

His mother turned the page, not looking at him, though he sensed she was listening.

"What do you have in the bags?"

She looked at the two blue Mays bags between her feet. "An extra sweater," she said, not unpleasantly. "Some Sal-tines ... apples. You want an apple, Danny?"

While he wagged his head indecisively, she lay her book on her lap, removed her mittens, and dug deeply into the Mays bag nearest him. Her hands smelled like Pond's lotion. A few strands of white hair stuck out from her balaclava. It was amazing how much she'd aged since he last saw her. He wondered how long she'd survive living at the Vigilant.

She held out to him the least bruised of two badly bruised apples.

"McIntosh," she said, "your favorite."

He took the cold apple, pleased she remembered.

"It's half priced fruit," she said apologetically, watching him inspect the bruises. "From the A 'n P on Third Avenue. Just eat around the bad parts."

He bit into the good part of the apple, picturing her in the alley behind the A&P, rifling through the smelly dumpster. He shook the picture away and took another bite. Behind the backstop across the way, the rap music still played — the kids still passed their quart of beer and joint, and danced in their robotlike way.

It was all a little hard to believe, he thought, stamping his foot and driving an encroaching pigeon away. Here he was, in a playground in Manhattan, in the dead of winter, sitting beside the woman who used to do everything for him, cut his meat into little chewable pieces, give him soothing tummy rubs when his stomach ached — shower him with healing kisses when he fell from his two-wheeler, or scraped his knee while playing. And here she was living in a run-down flophouse, surviving on lunch at the Salvation Army — on bruised fruit she scavenged from supermarket dumpsters.

"When'dja get back, Danny?"

"Sunday," he said, sitting up. He watched her fold the corner of a page and close the book. "Three days ago."

"I know what day it is, Danny."

"Oh." He bounced to his feet to keep warm. "Sorry."

"Ya not used to this cold, are ya?" she said. "Africa must be nice and warm."

"Mostly. It depends on where you are, Ma. Africa's a big place — there's forty-four countries. It's three times the size of the U.S."

"Really?" she said, raising her white eyebrows. "I didn't know it was that big."

"Ma, what happened? You want to talk about it?"

She looked away, squinting into the sunlight.

"You and Dad have a fight?"

She laughed, waving away the suggestion with her mittened hand. She looked over at the empty, sunlit handball courts, beyond which three lanes of cars, buses and trucks battled their way down Second Avenue. "Your father wouldn't bother," she said, then laughed again. "A fight? Nah. That woulda taken too much effort."

"Well, he and everybody else send their love, Ma," he lied. "They all miss you, you know. We're all very worried about you."

She frowned, then looked him in the eye. "I'm just an old, worn-out machine to them, Danny. Probably to you, too. Just an old black 'n white tv set whose tubes don't work anymore."

He slid closer to her on the bench. "Come on now, Ma, that's not how anybody feels."

"I've served my purpose," she said, squinting up into the sun, "now I'm dirt." She undid the top button of her coat, and he saw she had on a second coat underneath.

"Why don't we get a cup of coffee somewhere," he said, "and talk about it? Someplace nice and warm?"

Her face hardened. "No, thank you,"

she said politely. She opened the book to her place. "I'm just fine here. I don't need anybody's coffee."

"Aren't you cold, Ma?" he said a few minutes later. "I'm freezing."

She looked down at his bare, purplish hands, then up at his uncovered head.

"No hat and gloves, heh?"

He studied the laces on his new Wallabees. "Look, Ma ..."

"Whatja leave 'em home?"

"I left them at Kevin's."

"Boy-oh-boy, Danny," she said with that familiar smile. She took off her balaclava and mittens and handed them to him. Her white hair was cropped short, and she was thinning on top.

"Nah — it's all right, Ma," he said, pushing away the balaclava and mittens. "I'm not that cold. Really."

"Go 'head, put 'em on — you'll catch your death 'a cold. You're not used to this weather. Go on, Danny, take 'em."

He took the balaclava and mittens, and put them on.

"You ever read this book?" she said, holding the cover up to him.

He told her he hadn't.

"Boy, this woman's sharp." She began reading where she'd left off. "One sharp cookie, this woman is." She read a paragraph or so, then looked at him. "She knows what goes on between man and woman. And she ain't afraid to write it."

He wiped his nose on the back of one of her mittens, opened and closed his hands, which were slightly numb. He couldn't take this much longer. Gradually he brought his arm around the top of the bench, then around her shoulders. He gave her shoulders the slightest pressure, just enough to make himself felt, but no more. Her shoulders stiffened.

After a few minutes, he felt her shoulders relax. Then he asked her if she'd come with them to L.A., and — before she could refuse — if they could please go someplace else, just to sit if that's all she wanted. Her shoulders stiffened.

"I don't want to be anybody's burden, Danny," she said, turning from him, squinting into the sun. "I'm gonna get a job here. I'll be all right, don't worry."

"What if you don't find one?"

"I'll find one." She closed the book and rested it sideways in her lap. "If not I'll get by on social security."

"How much is that these days?"

She looked at him, annoyed. "Half your father's," she said, looking away. She studied the kids behind the backstop across the way. "Two-fifty a month." She dug into one of her bags, came up with a black ski hat and a pair of

mitten, and put them on. Then she looked at him.

"Listen, I don't want your pity, Danny. I'll get by. I always have, I always will. Don't worry about it. I won't starve. Believe me."

"What if you don't get a job?"

She sighed and and looked across the park. "I will."

"Have you started looking?"

"A little," she said, though from the way she said it he sensed she'd actually looked a lot. "Here and there."

"And?"

"Nothing yet," she said, looking at the Second Avenue traffic. "Not many people want to hire a sixty-three-year-old woman who lives at the Vigilant." She turned to him. "Look, can we talk about something else? How's Lynn and Jacob?"

looked down at her brown rubber boots. "Don't worry, Danny, somethin'll come along. Always has, always will. Don't pity me — I don't want your pity."

"Apartments are cheap out there, Ma."

"Where?"

"L.A. Me and Lynn'll be living in an expensive one, but there's cheaper spots around. We could find you something you could afford. Lynn's brother's in rentals. We could put you up until he found you something."

At that her shoulders relaxed, and he rubbed them a little harder, his hand thawing slightly inside her mittens.

"Look, Ma, it's my turn now. I'll take care of you."

"I don't need anyone to take care of me. I can take care of myself."

"Whaddyamean?"

"That she's Jewish?"

She rolled her eyes and pursed her lips, then looked at him. "Jewish, smooish — what's it matter? As long as you love her, and she loves you." She cooed to the brown pigeon with white tail feathers bobbing toward her, and dropped it a scrap of bread. "Look at me 'n your father. We're both Catholic. Irish. What good it'd do? As long as you love her, Danny, and she loves you. That's all that counts." She tossed the rest of the slice to the pigeons coming toward her. "You kids're all grown up now. Independent. I don't want to burden you. You got your own lives now."

But he could see her heart wasn't in it. And after a few minutes of watching the backstop gang terrorize the Second Avenue traffic, he said, "Remember that old Horn 'n Hardarts, Ma? Near Radio City? The one we used to eat at after the Easter show?" Her small smile told him she did. And after invoking a few more old memories, and picking at another of her bruised apples, she agreed to go there for *one* cup of hot chocolate.

On the way to the subway she asked how the others were. He told her all he knew — about Kevin's decision to sell his old taxis and buy Peugeot diesels to save on gas. She thought it was a good idea.

"It's amazing how far we've come," he said. He thought of the old apartment, he and Sean and Kevin in one bedroom, Sue, Katey and Meg in the other, she and Dad sleeping in the living room on the convertible couch.

"Yeah," she said, smiling. "I'm very proud of all of you. I know your father is too."

She let him take her bags beside the Haagen Dazs at Third Avenue.

"I see you're gettin' a little gray, Danny," she said, as they passed a man sleeping on cardboard beside B. Altman's. "Ain't it somethin' how time flies?" She reached up and tugged his earlobe through the balaclava. "How's it feel to be an old fart, heh, Danny-boy?"

"You know, Ma, you'd really like California." He knew that after hearing more about L.A., and with a good warm meal in her stomach, she'd soften to the idea. "It's nice and warm there. No more New York winters, no more snow."

"Ah, but I hate sticky weather, Danny. I hate it worse than winter."

"But L.A.'s dry warm, Ma — not muggy like here."

"Yeah?" She stepped aside to let two Spanish kids in a hurry pass, her face



GRAPHIC BY MARS MENSCH

Are they fitting in all right? You two pick out a school yet for Jacob in California? What does he look like, is he big, small, does he play baseball, basketball?"

"Do you have to tell them where you live?"

She rolled her eyes and clucked her tongue. "They got to have someplace to call to tell me I got the job."

"Well ... can't you arrange with the guy at the desk? For him not to answer the phone with 'The Vigilant'?"

She smiled patiently. "A woman named Irene works the desk. Jamaican — late-forties. Very nice. But she's got a hundred 'n twenty residents. The owner says she's gotta answer 'Vigilant'. What's she gonna do, lose her job over me?" She

"All right, all right. But at least let me help. Can't I help?"

A dapper old man and his well-groomed afghan entered through the opposite gate. The afghan came over and sniffed at Dan's crotch, then ran back to its owner.

"I don't need anyone's help," she said, watching the old man leash his afghan near the water fountain. "I don't need anyone to take care of me. No thanks."

"No one's going to take care of you, Ma. We just want to help a little, that's all."

His mother sighed. She fished out a slice of stale rye bread from her coat pocket, pitched it to the pigeons milling around the trash can.

"Is it because of Lynn."

brightening. "Much of a breeze out there, Danny?"

"Sure," he said, and he improvised about the "year-round tradewinds" that blew off the Pacific.

"And mild," he added half a block later, knowing her penchant for moderation. "It's got four seasons, but mild seasons. Not too warm, not too cold, just nice."

She said nothing, but he knew it was a good sign. He figured she was already imagining herself cruising around sunny Southern California, in a bright little VW convertible. With no husband to serve or answer to, and finally doing what she pleased — perhaps broadening her horizons with a college degree.

At the Sixth Avenue station, the white attendant in the token booth gave him a funny look, and it occurred to him that he and his mother were a strange sight — he in his worn green balaclava, oversized bomber jacket and baggy pants, and his mother, this shabbily dressed woman who might easily live on the street. But he shrugged off the attendant's look, and the subtle stares from a well-dressed couple on the platform, and he thought ahead to his next move.

When he went home, either with her, or with a firm promise to meet her again tomorrow, he'd talk to the others about setting up a monthly fund, until she got on her feet financially. It was only fair the others share the cost of her upkeep. But perhaps she'd be happier living with Kevin and Nancy, in their big house in Larchmont. She might be better off staying in New York, and Kevin's kids would be good for her. L.A. would be a drastic change — at her age it might be too difficult to adjust. The house in Santa Monica had only two bedrooms, which he and Lynn had figured were enough for them and Jacob, but which would be a bit tight with a guest. Surely his mother wouldn't want to share a bedroom with a nine-year-old. But he knew they'd work something out. The important thing was that she have a home.

He leaned against the old wooden bench on which his mother sat, and inhaled the urine stench of the platform, read the Marlboro and Burger King clock advertisements. He stepped over to the track, and looked down at the scummy, garbage-filled water between the rails. He pulled out his wallet and counted his traveler's checks. There were ten twenties and a fifty left. He tried picturing the area around Radio City, but couldn't, and he realized the old Horn & Hardarts had probably been torn down long ago, replaced by some

chic ethnic restaurant, some expensive place like the one Kevin took him to. He wondered where they could go instead.

When he heard the familiar roar from the tunnel, he took his mother's arm. The corrugated-steel B train screeched to a halt. He picked up his mother's bags with one hand, and with the other guided her safely into the warm train. It was not as spotless and shiny as the new 4 train he'd seen earlier at Grand Central, but the car was more modern than the old painted ones on the Flushing line.

YUPPIES OUT, PICO 147, and other spraypainted names and slogans covered the walls, but the blue fiberglass seats were clean and comfortable.

"Nice and warm, isn't it?" he said to her, as he enjoyed the heat, the relative quiet of the ride. She nodded and smiled, and squeezed his forearm. Otherwise as the train moved sluggishly uptown, she sat in silence, still wearing her black ski hat and mittens, her feet crossed contentedly beneath her. She'll be just fine, he thought, shifting away to give her more room. She'll be just fine.

Two punks in black combat boots, leather jackets and blond spiky mohawks stormed through the car; on the back of one's jacket was scrawled, in white paint, Kapital, Kapital Uber Alles; on the other's, Fuck Amerikkka.

"I think that Horn 'n Hardarts is on Forty-Sixth, Danny," his mother said, as the train sped into Forty-Second Street. "We should get off at Rockefeller Plaza, the next stop."

He nodded.

She chuckled. "That is, if it's still there, Danny. They probably tore it down long ago. We'll probably have to go someplace else."

"That's all right."

"You know, honey," she said as the doors closed, "I'd insist on paying you back whatever you lay out for me. Rent, food, whatever. I don't want any hand-outs. As soon as I get a job I'll pay ya right back." She removed her mittens and rubbed her red, chapped hands. "And as soon as I get a job I'll be right out and into my own little place. You 'n Lynn got your own life."

"Sure, Ma. However you want to work it."

Opposite them sat a woman Lynn's age, deep in thought, and as he studied her reflective face he wondered if Lynn would go along with this. He should've asked her before offering her what he had; Lynn wasn't exactly an African — she'd been raised in comfort, and liked her privacy, and a fair amount of space. A two-bedroom house was small, and with his mother it might be uncomfort-

able — for all of them.

After doing his best to ignore her, he met the stare of the attractive young black woman sitting at the end of their bench. Her lovely figure was cloaked in a form-fitting beige longcoat; she wore an expensive fur hat, and shiny lavender boots. She'd been eyeing him since they got on, with what he'd thought was unabashed attraction. But now, as he studied her delicately lipsticked and rouged face, he realized her look was one of amusement, at the sight of him and this shabby old woman sitting side by side. He blushed uncontrollably, as he hadn't done in years, and he looked down the car, feeling foolish, and suddenly embarrassed to be sitting beside his mother.

He felt a wave of guilt for his thought, but caught sight of a Spanish woman and her son, a handsome boy of ten or eleven, at the far end of the car.

Watching the woman and her son, he found deep within his memory his mother's breakdown, which she'd had when he was eleven. She'd convinced herself she was going to die — she'd even insisted on writing her will, and on seeing Father Hanratty for her last rites. And one morning, as he ate breakfast, with an awful gleam in her eye, as if she were punishing him for her bondage as housewife and mother, she told him she wanted him to be a good boy after she died. And he'd cried and cried, and had bad dreams for months, even after she returned from the hospital. What if she started with that crap again — in front of Jacob? He might be better off putting her in a home, where she'd be with people with whom she shared common interests and memories. They could find one near Santa Monica, visit her every Sunday, take her on picnics to the beach. Or perhaps she'd be better off living with Kevin and Nancy, or Sean and his girlfriend.

As they pulled into Rockefeller Plaza, the stop for Horn & Hardarts, his mother stood up. The conductor announced something over the p.a. The doors slid open, and he felt the cold air from the platform slap his cheek. His mother stood waiting for him at the door, her two shopping bags in hand.

"This is the stop, Danny," she said, smiling. She waited a moment, and then the smile left her face. She stepped out and the doors closed, leaving him watching, but still seated, on the train headed uptown.

by Bob Slaymaker

OUT COULD!



1 BUT WHEN I WOKE UP IN THE INFIRMARY... I BEGAN TO SEE THE LIGHT... FOR THE FIRST TIME IN MY LIFE.



2 THERE'S NO FUTURE FOR ME IN THAT JOB... AND THERE WON'T BE ANY FUTURE UNTIL I ABANDON MY CHILDISH WAYS, AND THROW AWAY MY BLUE COLLAR.



3 YOU KNOW, THERE'S A LOT OF TRUTH TO WHAT NOONAN IS SAYING! HECK! I'M NOT GOING TO WRITE DEPRESSING STORIES ABOUT HOW PEOPLE REALLY LIVE - IT'S BUSINESS FOR ME.



5 WELL, IT DIDN'T HAPPEN OVERNIGHT. MANIPULATING (ABSTRACT) MARKET-FORCES MAY BE EASY, BUT YOU HAVE TO LEARN HOW TO DO IT WITHOUT GETTING ARRESTED.

6 IN NO TIME I HAD A VERY HIGH-POWER CAREER ON WALL STREET. THE BOSS LIKED ME 'CUZ I WAS RUTHLESS...



7 SO, IF WE COVERTLY DISCOVER PRECISELY WHEN IBM WILL BUY OUT ALL OF ITS COMPETITORS AND ALLY OURSELVES WITH THE AUTHORITARIAN REGIME, WE'LL BE DOING WELL INDEED



8 NOT ONLY DID ALL CORPORATIONS MERGE TO FORM USA, INC., BUT THEY ESTABLISHED A GLOBAL SYSTEM OF ABSOLUTISM AND INNOVATION. I WAS THE JEUNEUSE DOG OF THE NEW ORDER. 'CUZ I WAS YOUNG, WHITE, AND RICH...



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GRAPHIC BY MARS MENSCH

Another Mad Adventure

Dear PW,

Well, it's my second day out of the Psych Ward, and I'm still trying to deal with the diagnosis, at the ripe old age of 30, of being a "paranoid schizophrenic." This handy label was given to me after I disclosed that my brother was diagnosed as paranoid schizophrenic 15 years ago. And you know the American Medical Association PR about how it's all caused by some genetic thing, how it runs in the family, or some such shit.

I stopped talking to my brother Jim when I was eight years old. He just seemed too damn crazy for a perfectly sane person such as myself. Jim was best friends with the mortician's son. I guess Jim had a hard time expressing what it was like to have this friend's older brother shut him inside a casket or take him down to the embalming room to see a corpse with a bullet hole in it. Not that anybody wanted to listen.

Another one of Jim's downfalls was that he had no interest in playing baseball. For this he was whipped repeatedly with four or five belts because my dad thought he was a sissy faggot. By the time he was 11 or 12, Jim had become a vegetable, and laid in bed all day talking to the voices in his head. I hated him even more. His very existence got on my nerves.

A few days after blood started gushing from my vagina, I learned that I had indeed started my first period. The next day, I was completely taken by surprise when my parents announced their new policy of giving me the same treatment, which soon developed into an S/M ritual that lasted throughout high school. All I had done to deserve this was to call my mother a bitch.

Jim now haunts the streets of Plymouth, Indiana, a homeless street person, scrounging around for a free drink, and embarrassing my parents on purpose, so they say. I asked if anybody had ever tried to help him apply for disability benefits, so he could at least have the basic human

dignity of receiving food and shelter. The thought had never occurred to them. After all, that would be like getting *welfare*. Perish the thought!

My sister Jeanne, the renowned innocent angel, recently visited me with her two sons. Three years ago I told Jeanne that my friend David had died of AIDS. "Is AIDS still around?" she asked. I stopped visiting David in the hospital because my boyfriend didn't want me to. I was weary of his constant blathering about how I might get AIDS just by touching David and breathing the same air. I didn't want him to leave me. To me, he was life itself.

(And let's not forget my four abortions, the last one at the urging of the above-mentioned boyfriend, after I bought myself a maternity wardrobe and married him. Yes, I did file for divorce immediately. But we reconciled a few times in later years. He was so cute.)

"OK, so she doesn't read the papers," one of my therapists surmised of Jeanne. So what? All I know is that when my sister left, I was standing at the kitchen sink, mulling over this and that, and suddenly it was as if someone slugged me in the gut, and I fell to the floor, and cried for two days. My nephews would inherit the legacy of denial, confusion, and fear unless I did something NOW!

My solution was to sit down and write my life story in order to grasp why my family was so psychotic. To do this, I forced myself to overcome my total creative block of 15 years. My tome grew to 20 or more pages. I couldn't care less about eating or sleeping because I was so intent at getting at the truth. When I inserted a passage about the tragic fates that had overtaken almost everyone my family or I had been friends with, I cracked.

Actually, the first couple of days in the Psych Ward weren't too bad. It was a humbling experience. My biggest complaint was that the drugs they pumped into me didn't help my depression and anxiety any, they just scrambled my brains, and my new

label destroyed my credibility.

I had a hacking cough due, apparently, to my taking up smoking again, which goes with the territory in a place like that. The nurse said she was going to give me an injection to determine if I had TB. It seems they use a pork derivative serum for this, and I freaked. I thought of those poor people in Belle Glades, Florida (see Covert Action Information Bulletin's no. 28 and 29). But it was clear that I could not get out of there unless I submitted. I later found another injection mark which I cannot explain.

I noticed that copies of my stories kept disappearing and reappearing. Someone had opened my bottles of contact lens disinfectant and saline solution, so I chucked everything, including the contact lenses. I remembered how a woman in Marin went blind after using contaminated eye drops.

When I found a piece of rope on a shelf behind my bed, nestled underneath a pile of newspapers, I could not contain my horror. It was just the right length for a garrote. I know my murder mysteries. I brought it to one of the few therapists I trusted, who pointed out how paranoid I was, for the millionth time.

Thus, I flunked the Reality Test, and when my friends started a steady campaign for my release, my shrink used the rope incident as proof that I wasn't "ready." But my friends look very conservative, so he finally agreed to let me go as long as I stayed with them.

And this, dear *Processed World*, is where you come in! The point, at last! My friends brought me a copy of your latest issue, which I was happy to see after letting my subscription lapse a number of years ago. Today, I took it with me to read while enjoying breakfast, and I read the letters from your readers. It is strangely comforting to know that there are other people trying to survive honestly in this insane world, and who are trying desperately to maintain their self-respect.

If I can ever save up the bucks for a trip back to Indiana, I will look for my brother and get down on my knees and plead for forgiveness. And I will accept whatever his response is to my belated awareness. May I live long enough to do this.

I'm enclosing a check please start my subscription.

J. W. — Santa Cruz, CA



CHILDREN OF THE NIGHT

"The Children of the Day
Are Seen by Everyone
The Children of the
Night are seen by none."

by B. Brecht

Like American cities that are always more beautiful from afar, the schools of Oakland, CA get worse and worse the closer one gets. As a substitute teacher in them, I constantly face the cracks in the walls, the steps falling away from the buildings and the permanent October of paper whirling round in the wind that together comprises a perpetually rephrased statement of rejection. The students and staff reporting each day cannot possibly ignore that these are places of no account, the bottom of the line. If there was any concern at all, it would be child's play (literally) to organize kids to simply get the paper picked up.

Inside, the situation is poorer still. There are symbolic statements of care and order placed in the vicinity of the front office. Each school usually has an uplifting motto near the front door: "Rise to the Heights with Reading," for example, or "Success through Responsibility," "Providing the Best Possible Services," or "We Can Do It," but the further away from the main office, the bleaker the scene becomes. The paper debris gets heavier, the light poorer, the graffiti bolder and the effluvium from the rest rooms more obtrusive. Some of the worst corners of the school combine all of these features. In dark gloomy rooms, water drips from the pipes while fumes waft in from the lavatory on one side and the "cafetorium" on the other.

The general structural problems of the schools are depressing, but it is, after all, possible to create a superb environment for learning in a city loft, a thatched shack in the jungle, a quonset hut. In Oakland, however, the sordidness is massively compounded by the students' own problems, which manifest themselves in tiny classroom details.

Most rooms bear the scars of conflict—obscenities scrawled wherever possible (on walls, desks, seats, texts, dictionaries). Whatever can conveniently be defaced or degraded is defaced and degraded: a kind of effort at consistency in which the external world is

unconsciously matched with the internal. If the inside is a jumble, then the outside will be sculpted to match. The rituals of coming of age also require attention: the use of red ink in seats to simulate menstrual discharge helps relieve boredom and celebrates the unfolding of biological changes both at the same time.

This is all part of the mix. The black and brown adolescent kids come piling into the trashed or stripped down classrooms and there they get the treatment, or the Learning. But the Learning is really the least cruel of the schools' ingredients, given the fund of sincere, benevolent intent behind it. Most vile is the understood, agreed-upon mandate that these really aren't schools at all. They are holding facilities, warehouses to contain the dangerous impulses of impoverished youth. The youth are not likely to take too kindly to the Learning under these circumstances.

A significant minority of kids are furious with the idea of being contained against their best interests (whatever they may be) and continuously invoke chaos against most signs and tokens of mind.

Some examples:

Capping on a crazy. An emotionally disturbed kid (and there are usually four or five to a class) can be set off like a pétard by whispering about him behind his back or by stealing his property. He then wanders about the classroom complaining piteously looking for his things or seeking to wreak revenge on his tormentors. This can be the source of riotous amusement—particularly when the disturbed kid is singled out by the naive teacher for punishment. In the meantime, all learning is brought to a halt.

Sudden intimate needs made public. Simple things, the toilet, the sudden oncoming of the monthlies, finding someone's earlier monthlies right on your own seat, the effect of a strong fart nearby, the inedible lunch food coming to a dramatic resolution, all command universal attention when shouted at the right moment. Who could fault such legitimate needs?

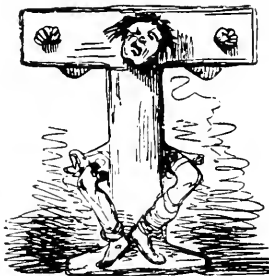
Direct attack. Erasers, spitballs, cosmetic ornaments, chalk—whatever comes immediately to hand—make up a limitless arsenal of missiles to be hurled at the teacher or other students whenever the opportunity presents itself (usually during some other disruption or at a momentary lapse of vigilance).

There are various ways of dealing with such onslaughts (and it is necessary to deal with them directly and immediately). They use up time and deplete energy but aren't as wearing as another, more subtle sort of classroom psychological warfare especially appropriate to a minority-populated, inner-city school. Consider the broad spectrum of faults and blemishes to which the creature is prey: bad breath, dandruff, warts, facial hair, bald spots, spaces between the teeth, jowls, asymmetries. Think of the amusement that can be derived from comments about these, ambiguously whispered, and add to it any of your own (quite possibly real) personal fears. Might there not be a stain near your fly? Is it impossible that there's a big ink blot on the back of your blouse or a red stain on the seat of your dress?

For days, weeks, and months the scenarios of displeasure are enacted: Marquita waves her hand in front of her nose as the teacher approaches. "Bad breath, there can't be no wrong in telling the truth," Dante says nearby.

"Here comes Ol' Dracula Breath," says Malike in a real deep voice.

Added to that is the epithet; there is no way to escape from the word "nigger." Its use is pervasive and continuous. The purposes served are legion: a putdown, a sign of friendship, an expression of desire to become friends, a statement of equality, of inequality. Mostly its use is the racist judgment of the outside world rising up inside, "You black filth!" for example. When used against me, however, in "you fucking nigger" (instead of "honky"), its use is a puzzle. It also puzzled the black campus administrator who hesitated a few moments before leading the poor child away to the office. "We need to have those exact words written down on the referral form," he said.



A response to the psychological warfare isn't mandatory. It can't be since the meaning may be too ambiguous, too ephemeral, too self-distracting. There are ways to reduce its occurrence but not eliminate it altogether. Ultimately it boils down to learning to ignore it much like a stamping machine in an assembly plant. The noise intrudes into your consciousness only when it ceases; the cost is difficult to assess. The racial issue, on the other hand, surfaces continually in a variety of forms comprehensible and incomprehensible—and to ignore it is impossible.

Take the recent large influx of refugees from southeast Asia, for example. The refugees make up a mélange of peoples from Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Vietnam. Many have regionally distinct cultures and dialects. Their arrival is so recent that they possess very limited political power (as noncitizens and nonvoters). The students seem to share (1) a very poor comprehension of English, (2) a profound sense of familial identity, and (3) an avid desire to absorb the learning that the schools are presumably supposed to set forth.

Now the District, following its own political priorities, provides the very minimum of support for these kids. In the ESL (English as a Second Language) classes that I've taught, they're all bunched together. The Vietnamese sit cheek by jowl with the Hmong, the Cambodians with the Thais, in a veritable tower of Babel. *There are no books.* The regular teacher brought in material she had bought or cadged on her own.

"I've pleaded with the principal and I've called Downtown," she told me, "and they said that these kids' comprehension of English was so bad that it would be a waste of money to get books for them. So I guess they're saying that the students are so dumb that they have to stay dumb."

The kicker in this is that the southeast Asian kids don't "stay dumb." On the contrary, *they sweep the honor rolls.* From half to three-fourths of the honor rolls that I've seen in the schools (posted conspicuously near the front office) are

loaded with names like Mok Moi, Reaksme Leng, Than Phueng and Won Fang. In several schools *all* the names on the honor roll were Oriental. And in class the behavior of these kids is exemplary: quiet, industrious and curious, they represent a teacher's fantasy of the good student.

As one might expect, this doesn't go down very well with their non-Oriental classmates. "Here come the chinky-dinky-linkies," they say. Once, when I wrote a sentence, "He ate the dog," on the board to illustrate a point of grammar, students called out, "Oh, that means that you're talking about the Dinkies." Meanwhile, Oriental kids in the lower grades are literally amusing punching bags for their more aggressive classmates since they don't seem to fight back.



Once, in an awards assembly, the black principal read from a list of academic achievers: "The highest honors," he said, "go to Moi Fen for the best grades in school." Dead silence. No one moved. "The second best," he went on "is Tai Beng." Again, dead silence. After about eight or nine more such names (and more dead silence), he reached Laquita Robinson. Laquita rose and went to the podium to claim her certificate amid uproar and applause. The experience reminded me of tales of immigrant Jews in urban schools at the turn of the century.

Such group rivalry is part of an American pattern. It is at least comprehensible. There are, however, things that absolutely mystify me. In one all-girl music class, I decided at the end of a particularly crazed Friday to encourage the kids to sing any song they wanted to—just to get their minds off attacking each other, the classroom or me. So they got into singing psalms and hymns. Then after a while, a personally commanding girl named Keisha, who had been leading the singing, began to preach.

She acted as if they were in church, and she spoke of all the good things that Jesus was bringing. Then she went off into a melodic prayer. People began to feign swooning, talking in tongues, and being brought back by their sisters. All of that was fair enough. Then she began to speak of the Devil and how he was always around. About the same time she was talking about the Devil, one of the students shut off the lights (which puzzled me since it takes a special kind of key to do this), and another moved quickly to cover the windows with heavy curtains.

At the precise moment that the room was at its maximum darkness, Keisha reached the apogee of her oration, and simultaneously the class produced a monstrous ear-piercing shriek. It must have terrified everyone in a two-hundred-yard radius. I don't doubt that they had literally called up the Devil in themselves. The campus administrator showed up in a minute, but there was nothing to be seen.

After acting vile and horrible for about another ten minutes (school was almost over for the week), the students managed to pull off one more quick black mass. As the final bell rang and the second show concluded, they ran rampaging out of the room, turning over chairs and desks and flinging ketchup (from the little disposable squeezies available free in the cafetorium) on the walls.

Five minutes later, a little sweet waif ambled back alone into the room and, without saying anything, helped me set the room's chairs upright.

* * *

My focus has been upon the color and clash of the classroom. What happens to learning in all of this has been only hinted at. In most instances, I found that it isn't so much nonexistent as transformed into a venerable irrelevance. By "venerable," I mean an entity of reverence, like a church. I say "irrelevant" because learning is largely incapable of attainment under the circumstances.

For students, it is something to put up with in the hope that if you got through it maybe you could graduate and if you graduated, maybe you could get a job. For administrators, it's something that's periodically measured by the state and used as a basis of comparison with other administrators. For teachers, it usually serves as a form of behavioral and social control. It gives the students something to *do* during the class hour so as to prevent chaos.

A surreal quality to learning thus evolves, something suitable for hortatory slogans near the main office and for peddlers of success motivation schemes (*HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN LESS THAN TEN MINUTES A DAY!*), who seem to have discovered a gold mine in the ghetto schools of Oakland. In the absence of relevance, in reliance upon teaching materials of questionable worth even in a suitable environment, in the presence of students whose backgrounds make learning difficult if not impossible, the imputed purpose of the school takes upon itself the characteristics of a scam.

Robert Stone, in his *Hall of Mirrors*, has one of his characters describe the concept of the "Big Store." The Big

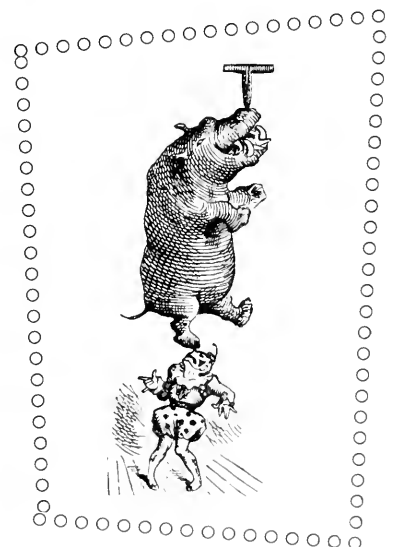
THIS MAN

This man had a black coat.
This woman had a machine gun.
This man is drunk.
This man got soot.
This woman had a big gun.
This man is drunk.
This people is drunk.
The man got blood.
The gang or bad.
This children was shoot.
The woman was drunk.
I am drunk.
This woman is shoot.
The man is drunk.
This woman is soing.
This is my day.
The man is shoot.

by Jamila, age 7,
Los Angeles, 1988
from a class assignment,
"Gangs and How They Affect Us"

Store is a real enough place, all right, made of plaster and wood and conventional furniture, but it's part of a confidence scheme designed to convince others of the truth of a fiction. "The Big Store Man," Stone's character explains, "makes his own reality, understand. He creates a whole world that somebody, for some reason, wants to believe in. Real people, real action, but it's not exactly happening, you dig?"

by Allen Krebs (C) 1988





A FAMILY BUSINESS

GILLIE & GILLIE CRYOGENICS

Deep in his most secret heart of hearts, Mr. Elliott had always believed that ordinary rules of existence did not apply to him. Though not yet forty, he was already considered to have achieved world-class status on the corporate playing field. He had an office on Montgomery Street, a home in Pacific Heights, a condo in Maui, a membership at the Bohemian Club, a black BMW, a red Porsche, and over two hundred silk ties. He had no wife or children, but he wanted none. He wasn't a man who sought emotional succor from the opposite sex or felt the need for a warm arm wrapped around his waist at night. Each day he gave birth to himself. That was enough.

He was not prepared for death. The occasional bouts of moderate illness he had experienced in his life he had fought all the way just as he had fought every circumstance not wholly to his liking. Mr. Elliott was used to exercising control. He liked the upper hand. He was stunned, therefore, when his doctor announced that his cancer was well advanced.

"How long do I have?" he asked. "Six months. Eight at the outside."

He took a deep breath to collect himself before he got up and walked out. He preferred not to waste time discussing chemotherapy and other treatment modalities that would at best permit him to survive through the end of the fiscal year. Mr. Elliott was already constructing an alternative crisis-management strategy. He went to visit cryonicist Barry Gillie, founder and president of Gillie Cryonics of Marin.

"Just what are my chances?" Mr. Elliott asked.

"Excellent," Dr. Gillie replied. "Much better than many candidates we inter-

view. After all, you're still a young man, and aside from your cancer, you're still healthy and whole. I think we can safely assume that a cure for cancer will eventually be discovered. All you need is time—and with cryonics, you can buy that time. My assistants and I are good at what we do, Mr. Elliott.

"My father developed this technique for suspending life indefinitely; it brought him a Nobel prize. I've devoted my life to perfecting his methods and making the process available to people like yourself. We can freeze the body down to the temperature of liquid nitrogen. That's minus 196 degrees Celsius—minus 330 degrees on the Fahrenheit scale. At that point, molecular motion stops, and one second's worth of degeneration takes about 300 trillion years. You can buy all the time you want."

"What about bringing me back?" Mr. Elliott asked.

"It's tricky," Gillie admitted. "Death, we have discovered, does not occur all at once. Rather, it's a gradual shutting down of systems. Starting up those systems again must also be gradual. Right now we're still grappling with the problem of tissue damage, which can be extensive, especially in organisms already technically expired. Very frustrating. But, of course, Mr. Elliott, you're still very much alive. And let me tell you: we've been quite successful at taking living organisms full circle. Maybe you'd like to see some of our work?"

"Yes, please."

"Just a moment, then," the doctor said. He picked up his phone receiver and punched the intercom button. "Wilson," he told the party on the other end, "would you bring Gordie in? We're going to see the animals."

A minute later, a lab assistant in a white coat came through the door holding the hand of a solemn, husky, red-haired boy of three or four.

"Thank you, Wilson," Gillie said. The child tottered over and leaned against the doctor's knees. "My son, Mr. Elliott," Mr. Elliott was surprised to see a child in such a place, and he said so. But Dr. Gillie stood firm in his reasons.

"I myself grew up in a laboratory very much like this one," he said. "I want the same for my son. The processes of life and death are still a mystery for us, but they must not be taboo. I want Gordie to feel completely at ease here. This is a family business, you know."

Mr. Elliott could think of no reply. The concept of family did not move him, and he did not understand, or trust, the humanitarian impulse that drove men like Gillie. It had never held a place in his life. When he remembered his own father's death, all he felt was relief and vague gratitude at having at last been awarded control over the family assets.

"Gordie," the doctor said, "we're going to go see the animals. Would you like that?"

The boy brightened and grinned up at his father. Together the two men and the child strolled through a maze of hallways and into a large, cement-floored room filled with cages. All the lab animals—mostly hamsters, rabbits, and dogs—were foraging madly around their enclosures. The boy ran to a pen that held two beagles.

"His favorite," Dr. Gillie explained. "My Gordie is all-boy. Now, Mr. Elliott, I want you to know that each and every one of these creatures has been frozen and revived. With no evidence whatsoever of damage."

Mr. Elliott was duly impressed. Yet it was a big step he was contemplating, even for a risk-taker like himself. On the other hand, if he passed up this opportunity, the outcome was depressingly certain.

"I don't know," he said.

"I can understand how you must be feeling," Gillie said. "But I believe in this process. In fact..." He lowered his voice to a whisper and leaned confidentially toward Elliott. "In fact, I believe in it so completely that I was willing to risk my own son's life."

Mr. Elliott's eyebrows flew up as he realized what Gillie was saying. "Your son here? You tried the process on him?" "Yes, indeed," the doctor replied triumphantly. "And as you can see, he's perfectly all right. Just a normal three-year-old. But please, Mr. Elliott, don't spread it around. If my wife ever found out, she'd never let me babysit him again."

Mr. Elliott was sold. Maybe the old saying was right: you can't take it with you. But with the help of cryonics, he could at least come back and get it. He shook hands with the doctor and went home to settle his affairs.

Three months later, he had quit his job, bid his colleagues farewell, liquidated his assets, and left copious instructions for his lawyer, his broker, and his banker. Then, with just the suit on his back and wearing his favorite silk tie, he climbed into a cab and ordered the driver to take him across the bay to Gillie Cryonics of Marin.

That night as he lay stretched out on the clean and shining, stainless steel table in Gillie's operating room, he contemplated the nature of existence as he had known it. When he woke up again, Gillie had warned him, life might be altogether different than either of them could imagine. Mr. Elliott realized he might come to in this century or the next or thousands of years from now.

There was no telling. It was an adventure of magnificent proportions.

"Sweet dreams, Mr. Elliott," Gillie said as he leaned over him and swabbed his forearm with cotton soaked in alcohol. "I can't say when we'll meet again. Perhaps not until my son or my grandson or one of my far-flung descendants brings you around. But you'll be in good hands, I'm sure. When you do wake, there'll be time enough for you to live out the rest of your life the way God and nature intended. Just think how much interest your investments will have earned for you by then!"

A pleasant thought, indeed, and Mr. Elliott was content as the injection Gillie gave him took effect. Within moments

his attention slipped away. Then he seemed to find himself suspended near the ceiling of the operating room, looking down upon his own body lying naked on the table. He watched as the doctor and the assistant drained his blood, then filled his veins with the glycerol-based blood substitute that would act as antifreeze during the years he would lie suspended. He watched the entire process, and he wondered how it was that he felt no fear or disgust at the sight, only calm detachment. Then, when the two scientists had placed his body, head down, in the aluminum canister that would house him till the time of his resurrection, Mr. Elliott felt himself gently drawn down, like a kite on a string, into his flesh. His consciousness waned and sputtered out.

The next time Mr. Elliott knew anything, he was hovering near the ceiling again, in a large, dark vault lined with body-storage canisters. Below him, a young man in a white lab coat was mopping up. As he watched, a burly, red-haired man burst in and exclaimed hysterically, "Tom! What happened? Did we have another power failure?"

Tom, the lab assistant, shook his head and squeezed out his mop into a plastic bucket. "I don't think so, Gordie. Did you remember to pay the P.G. & E. bill the other day, like I told you?"

Gordie groaned and slapped his forehead. "Oh God," he said, "that must be

it. How can I be so stupid sometimes? What happened to the backup generators?"

"I don't know. Did you set them when you locked up last night?" "No, I thought you did it."

"Gordie, I left early yesterday. Remember? You were the last one out."

"Shit, that's right. How many did we lose?"

"Just three. Including your old man for the second time. Good thing none of them have any relatives likely to file a complaint."

"That's good. I don't need any more stink around here, that's for sure."

"Gee, I'm awful sorry, Tom. What should I do now?" Tom shrugged and leaned his mop up against one of the aluminum canisters. Mr. Elliott shivered as the mop's wooden handle clanked against the metal of his container. "Call that woman at the dog food factory again, I guess."

"Okay."

"While you're doing that, I'll flush 'em, cut 'em up, and bag 'em for you." Gordie looked grateful. "Thanks, Tom. You're so good to me. I don't know what I'd do without you." He headed for the door. Tom called him back.

"And, Gordie, tell her to pull her van around back. Don't let her park right out front again. It just doesn't look nice."

by Susan Gee Rumsey



GRAPHIC BY DENNIS R. PRIMITIVO

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